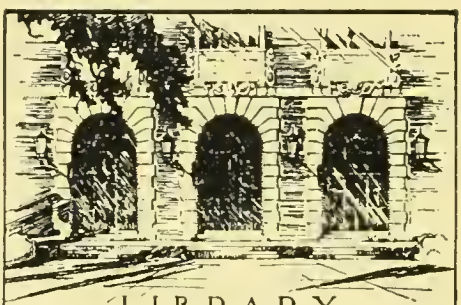
WOOERS AND WINNERS

MRS G. LINNÆUS BANKS



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WOOERS AND WINNERS;

OR,

UNDER THE SCARS.

VOL. III.

WOOERS AND WINNERS;

OR,

UNDER THE SCARS.

A Yorkshire Story.

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS

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"THE MANCHESTER MAN,"
"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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WOOERS AND WINNERS.

CHAPTER I.

JASPER'S SUCCESS.

THE coach which carried off the young couple had rolled away in a cloud of dust. Dora, loitering, school-bag in hand, to say a last saucy word to Allan, had skipped off to join another schoolfellow on her way to Well Bank, leaving Edith behind looking after the vanishing vehicle. The cheerful look faded from the face of the latter. She turned instinctively up the road, instead of through the village home; she had an intuitive perception that Janet would be bustling about noisily "t' put t'

haase ta reets," as she would have phrased it, now their visitors were gone, and Edith was not in a frame of mind to endure bustle.

She had put the best face she could on her brother's marriage, not to sadden him or his wife at the very outset, but she was far from sanguine over their future; and she walked on slowly, and, it must be added, sorrowfully, pondering and calculating their chances of happiness if Mr. Metcalfe refused to receive them, and they were left to themselves. "Grace knows nothing whatever of housekeeping, or the value of money; and Allan, even with Mrs. Sheepshank, has always had a comfortable home," she murmured to herself. "Poor things, I fear they have made a mistake, but we will hope for the best. Allan is brave and generous; they love each other dearly, and love works wonders!" Then her thoughts took another turn. "Ah, me, when Grace found a husband, I lost my brother. Never again will he be the old Allan!"

A gust of wind shook a wayside tree as

she turned into Tarn Lane, and sent a leaf or two gyrating in the air to settle at her feet. "Yes," said she, thinking aloud, "like these leaves our friends drop from us, or are torn away, until nothing is left us but memory."

"Nothing? Miss Earnshaw!" said a familiar voice behind her. "Is not hope left, as memory's companion? Will not the tree be green again in the spring?"

She gave a slight start. Jasper Ellis, treading on the ribbon of soft turf by the roadside, had come upon her unawares.

"The same leaves never return to the tree, Mr. Ellis," she answered, with a faint sigh, as she extended her hand to meet his.

"Not the same, but others more fresh and verdant," and he looked into her eyes without releasing her hand.

"To fall away in their turn," she replied, sadly, lifting her eyes to let them drop again before the light she saw in his, a light which brought a flush into her cheek.

"Not so, my dear Miss Earnshaw; may there not be a friend closer than a brother?

A friend whose affection only needs the sun of your smile to be what the lost brother never could have been, a lifelong support and comfort to you!" He spoke earnestly and eagerly, but never came a word of reply to her lips. Was she thinking of that other passionate declaration on which she had thrown an icy chill, or of her terror by that Tarn side, and the messenger of good tidings who had been so kind and gentle with her? Both, perhaps, for thought is swift. She walked on wondering what her utter loneliness would be if she sent *this* friend adrift—walked on blindly, stumbling at the slightest impediment.

He drew her arm within his own; he did not dare to cast it round her. Yet he held her close and bent lower that no expression of her mobile countenance should escape him.

"Edith," he whispered, in a voice flexible at all times, tremulous now with genuine emotion, "Is this avowal altogether unexpected? Have you not seen how for months and years I have hung upon your

words, haunted your footsteps, lived on your smiles?"

"No. I—I—thought you came to——"

"See Mr. Thorpe? Ah, Edith, young men rarely consort with old ones, unless some unsuspected magnet draws them. *You* have been the attraction to Ivy Fold. You will not shut the door against me now, will you?"

Her heart throbbed, she panted, hesitated, —could she shut out her brother's friend, her own friend, who had stood between herself and utter loneliness so long? A faint, hesitating "No," was her answer.

"Nor the doors of your heart, dear Edith?"

The hesitation was longer, more palpable.

How many years she had lacked and longed for a heart to beat in sympathetic unison with hers! Could this be the response? Allan's love had failed her; Dora, too, would seek another nest in time. She had hardly known what it was to be loved. Could she reject the cup that was placed to her lips? Had not Jasper become

a part of their daily life? Yet was he her ideal? Did she feel towards him as the heroines of her own romances were supposed to feel? She hesitated, lost her self-possession, wavered. The incertitude was very unlike Edith.

He repeated his question with still more tremulous eagerness.

This time there was a "No!" fainter than before; but he took the hand he held and pressed it gratefully to his lips.

Her fluttering colour came and went, she somehow felt as if a seal was set upon her life, and, as once before in that same spot, she grew faint and tottered as though she would fall.

Almost thankful for the chance, he threw his arm around her, and led her to the self-same stone where she had rested that memorable August afternoon. But he did not loose his clasp. There was something won he had been afraid to lose. And now the dark head drooped upon his shoulder; he thrilled at the surrender; laid his hot

lips on hers—they were cold as ice. She had fainted in reality.

Jasper's early errand to Cateral Hall had served him in good stead. Whatever excuse he invented for his late appearance at the office, it is certain he went back triumphant. In his eyes the world did not hold such a peerless gem as Edith Earnshaw; and henceforth he should wear the jewel on his own breast. He was not altogether satisfied with her tardy, hesitating acceptance; it lacked warmth; but that would come in time. All his fears of a rival were at an end. He was quite certain there was no pre-occupation of her heart. Edith could never have accepted him had she loved another. It was not in her nature. Yet how deep had been her devotion to her kin! There must be a more vital love lying dormant in her breast; it was for him to fan the latent spark into a flame. And surely unchangeable, ardent love like his must ensure return. She had only to discover that his heart and soul were hers, and hers only, and her breast

would glow with fervour like his own!

Ah! But was his heart and soul all hers? Was there not in his secret soul, unsuspected by himself, a passion stronger and more absorbing than the love of woman? Else why did a certain will in Lawyer Hartley's custody interest him so deeply? Wherefore did visions of Edith Earnshaw's few thousand pounds enter so largely into his calculations for the future? Let us not throw discredit on his love; *that* was sincere and genuine, no doubt. If it gained in intensity from the contemplation of Edith's guineas, its source had at least been pure, as boy-loves mostly are.

Edith did not doubt him for one instant; she only doubted herself. She shrank at first so coyly from his encircling arm, and from the kisses he dropped upon her brow or lips when he came and went, and retreated with such a bashful crimson on her cheeks to the solitude of her mother's white chamber when he was gone, to take herself to task and ask if the sisterly love she gave was sufficient to satisfy the cravings of such

a man—nay more, if the love he rendered, the love that seemed to hold and bind her fast, satisfied the yearning of her own soul. She never answered the question to her entire satisfaction, but she felt she was no longer alone, and as she knelt beside the bed in which no one had slept since the night her mother died, and prayed that her mother's last blessing might hallow her engagement, or sat by the window looking out at the stars, a sense of peace crept into her soul, and the motto on the chimney-piece had a new significance.

By-and-by the ineffable bliss of being loved, the new feeling of having some one to care for her, whose lot had hitherto been only to care for others, the reposeful sense of security and protection which the strong arm of a man affords to the woman who leans on it in faith and trust, all had their influence, and she ceased to question and analyse her own emotions.

A brighter light shone in her serene dark eye, a delicate tinge of rose settled on cheeks erst so pale, her voice might be

heard attuned to song as she went about her household ways; her thought and care for Dora never relaxed, but she no longer felt the exactions and caprices of the little damsel burdensome, and into her own verses crept a blither and a happier spirit.

"Whya, whya, Janet lass, whativer hez coom ta yer young mistress? Shoo's ez leetsome as a laverock,* shoo's swapped† her lilies for roses, an's gitten fair pratty, syne Maister Allan gat wed. Hearken to her oop theer."

"Oop theer," was the diamond-paned landing window above Dora's recess, and the speaker, who pointed with a shaking finger, was Solomon Bracken. He had been taking his customary morning airing in the churchyard, and, leaning on the wall —low within, yet high above the lane— had been watching the face of Edith as she alternately bent to a clothes-basket on the window seat, or turned to the large press at right angles to replace linen fresh from the wash, singing blithely over her task.

* Skylark. † Exchanged.

Janet was beating a door-mat against the wall, almost under his nose, but the mat was not very dusty, or he had dealt with dust so long it did not seem to affect him otherwise than to suggest a gossip. Something in his speech grated on Janet's understanding.

"Pratty! shoo's allus been pratty, to folk es hes eyen in their yeads. Talk o' lilies an' roses an' sike pousement, shoo's a prattiness es wunnot fade, noa moore nor that lily o' Sharon as a wiser Solomon nor yo' tells us abaght. An' sing ower t' weddin'!" —The tone and the toss of Janet's head were sufficient commentary.

"I's thinkin' sa pratty a lass 'ud be gettin' wed hersen afooar lang," insinuated Solomon, in his least wheezy croak. "I's seen moore nor one loikely young chep luikin' an' keekin' efter her."

"Han yo', owd wiseacre? Then let mea tell yo' theer bean't a chep in a' this parish az ba fit to wipe her shoon, let alane wed her, be toather wheer he will!" and with that expression of her opinion, Janet gathered

up her mats and retreated, muttering to herself as she went, "Not bud t' lad's meeterly weel, an' shoo mought goo farrer an' fare worse—but shoo mought ha' done better, or I'm mich mista'en." But not a word said the rough woman indoors that should damp the new-born joy of the young mistress of whom she was so proud.

Janet's outdoor disclaimer did not go for much. Jasper was too jubilant to keep his success a secret; his was the glee of one who has run a race and won it. He rubbed his hands together more frequently, ceased to bite his nails, dressed with redoubled nicety, walked with head erect and springy step, and had not his long head suggested the policy of taking Edith's guardians into his confidence, his whole manner would have made proclamation for him, in Giggleswick, at least.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Burrow, "you cannot mean it! Why, I thought—" but his under-lip closed over the upper, and what he thought he wisely kept to himself. In his very next visit to the village he left

his horse at the gate, and called, as he said, "to feel how the young lady's pulse beat," and, being satisfied, offered his congratulations. Lawyer Hartley also strayed to Ivy Fold, and his congratulations took the form of commendation of her choice, with a side fling at Allan. "So well conducted, so deferential to his elders, so painstaking, so careful; *he* would not rush into extravagance, and marry before he had the means to keep a wife. She would have a sensible husband and a smart lawyer, with an eye to the main chance."

There were feminine felicitations also before the engagement was three weeks' old, and none more sincere than those from Well Bank, though little Ann Vasey did burst into tears over the business, and very imprudently say that she was "afraid some one else, who should be nameless, would have a very sad heart when he heard of it," and was then sorry she had said it, so sudden and grave a change came over Edith's face and manner.

Allan and Grace were profuse in their

expressions of satisfaction, were "so delighted that their example was likely to be followed," and in the midst of all Edith felt alternately abashed and gratified. Dora had gone to Mother Wellington's one afternoon on a double errand for slate-pencil and parkin, and came tearing back with a very high colour and a much higher temper. Jasper had just preceded her, and had not released Edith from his embrace when Dora burst in at the parlour door, panting and breathless.

"Whya, whya, she says—she says—— Is it true, Jasper? Is it true, Edie?" and the child turned from one to the other impatiently.

"Who says? Is what true?" asked the pair.

"Betty Dyson. She says," and the eyes of the nine-year-old child flamed with excitement—"she says that Jasper is a-a-going to marry you, Edie, and take you away from me for ever! And he shan't! He shan't!" And she stamped her little feet on the carpet in a passion of rage.

Edith crossed the floor, took her by the shoulder caressingly, and, in a quiet tone, that carried conviction with it, said,

"Dora darling, our mother left you in my care the very night she died. No one, not even Jasper, shall take me from you, or separate us, until you yourself grow up and want to leave me."

"Sure? *quite* sure?" queried Dora, glancing defiantly across the room at Jasper, then lolling against the piano.

"Quite sure, darling. Jasper would not wish it." And Edith set a seal of assurance in a kiss on the child's flushed brow.

"Wouldn't I, though? The little termagant!" said Jasper as if to himself. This audible reply, though it took the tone of playful banter, sent Miss Dora off into a fresh fume straightway.

"Don't be alarmed, Felina, I am not going to run away with Edith yet awhile; and you know I shall have to cut pretty Felina's claws before anyone will carry *her* off."

She would fain have tried her claws upon

Jasper then, but Edith interposed, and, with a beseeching look towards her offending lover, endeavoured to soothe the irritated little maiden.

Before this could be effected the heavy drop-latch was again lifted, and Mr. Thorpe, carpet-bag in hand, entered the room, followed by a large dog; and Tip, arching his back, stood, with stiff and bushy tail, at bay.

Unobservant of the strange quadruped, Dora flung herself into her father's arms, as if in desperation, for refuge. Signs of tears and passion were unmistakably defacing the lovely little countenance.

The fond father questioned her. Explanation followed; explanation which took Mr. Thorpe considerably by surprise.

"Dear me! I never expected this. Why, why, I had hoped——"

What he had hoped was never known. Edith laid her hand upon his square shoulder.

"Are you not content, dear father?" she whispered.

"Oh! dear, yes, child; content, oh! yes"

(he did not appear particularly content), "Jasper will make you a good husband, no doubt; but—yes, Edie love, I am content—it is only natural. You have been a good girl, and, as long as you are happy, I have no right to be otherwise. One can't have all one wishes in this world. But—but I am hungry. What have you got for a traveller to eat?" It was clear he wished to dismiss the subject.

Janet answered that question, and soon they were all seated round an early supper in a bright, warm house, Mr. Thorpe insisting he must take the edge off his appetite before he said another word.

Presently Janet fell foul of the dog, and Mr. Thorpe, who had quite forgotten the animal, somewhat disconcerted, asked, "Ah, yes, where shall we bestow poor Keeper to be out of Janet's way? He was given to me by your Quaker friend in Barnsley, Edith."

"What! Mr. Lister?" and Edith's eyes brightened.

"Yes, and that reminds me, I have a

volume of his poems for you in my bag. Here it is,—'The Rustic Wreath.' He has only published it this year. It has attracted a good deal of notice already in Yorkshire; especially a long descriptive piece on the 'Hirings.'"

Edith took the book with delight. There was a presentation inscription on the fly-leaf, which brought a glow of pleasure to her face. She turned to the rustic verses mentioned.

Jasper felt himself neglected. With a curl of his upper lip he remarked, "Poetry! I thought nothing came from Barnsley but linen and coal. My grandfather has something to do with some coal-pits there."

"Yes, I know, I went there to meet him yester——"

Dora, with a watchful eye on Jasper's face, here interrupted in wondering tones.

"Poetry! Don't you like poetry? Edith makes poetry!"

"Does she?" responded Jasper, languidly surprised—he was more interested in

knowing his grandfather's business in Barnsley—"And Edith makes pies and puddings, and I like *them* better, don't you?"

Dora shook her fair curls, and looked doubtful. "I don't know. *I* like both. And Janet can make pies and puddings, but she can't make poetry," and the nod of her head was conclusive.

Mr. Thorpe laughed heartily.

Edith smiled—but faintly. She had an unpleasant feeling that there would be a broken link between her and Jasper.

Jasper, put on his defence, argued, "Yes, Dora; pies and puddings will feed you. We can't live on poetry."

"Don't be too sure of that," chuckled Mr. Thorpe, proud to see his "lile bairn" get the best of it. "Poetry got Thomas Lister into a linen warehouse, and it would have got him the post-mastership, but his Quaker conscience stood in the way, and he could not take the Government oath. So you see poetry has found *him* a living."

"Oh, indeed! Yet I don't suppose grandfather bought the coalpit for a mere

song," persisted Jasper, anxious to turn the conversation to account.

"He has not bought the colliery—he only leases it for a client of his," and no more did reticent Mr. Thorpe say on the subject.

But Jasper, coupling the word "client" with the letter found in the card-rack, built up hypotheses of his own.

CHAPTER II.

MARTIN'S MAJORITY.

JASPER'S contempt for poetry, so openly expressed, was not without its effect. Whether Mr. Thorpe had given him an idea of a commercial value attaching to such a commodity, or he was seized with a sudden compunction for his unloverlike reception of Dora's communication, he was fluent in apologising on his next visit; but neither apology nor persuasion could induce Edith to submit her verses for his perusal.

She was not so vain as to suppose her fugitive lyrics rose to the dignity of poems, was timidly doubtful of her own powers, conscious of inability to interpret fully her own conceptions and emotions, but she was

also conscious of a something within the fountain of her brain too sacred for ridicule or contempt.

Many a time and oft, she had been tempted to throw all her effusions into the fire in utter dissatisfaction. But she seldom acted upon first impulse, and a small matter served to restrain her.

Mr. Thorpe had one day remarked, when she was singing to herself over her work, "That is a pretty song; I don't think I ever heard it before," and if he forgot it five minutes afterwards, the honest, gratuitous criticism had been expressed, and in entire ignorance of her authorship. It stood her in good stead now, in the face of Jasper's sweeping dictum, which might have touched her more deeply and influenced her differently had her love been of a more absorbing character.

As it was, it caused her, when she wrote a grateful line of thanks to Thomas Lister for his "Rustic Wreath," to enclose a sample or two of her own versification, and to ask, modestly enough, for an opinion on their

merits, at the same time explaining how his recitations, during their journey together from Skipton to Settle, had roused the spirit of poesy within herself.

A week—a fortnight—passed without any acknowledgment. She felt not a little daunted and discouraged.

Three weeks went by, and then the postman's horn heralded a gratifying communication. It appeared that the "Barnsley Poet," finding her verse quite of another character to his own, did not feel satisfied to sit in judgment on it, and had transmitted her rhymes to his stout friend Ebenezer Elliott, then rising into popularity, and they had been returned with the brief criticism, "Poems with the right ring in them. They have a spark of true Promethean fire." Edith's face glowed as she read. She could scarcely realise that this was written of her immature verse. Still more was she surprised at a suggestion that she should send a contribution to an editor, whose address was enclosed.

But her lips parted in amazement when,

on opening a newspaper which accompanied the letter, she saw, where a corner was turned down, some lines headed, "The Kingfisher's Nest," and knew them for her own.

Without comment she handed the newspaper to her stepfather, who conned it over as he smoked his evening pipe by the fire. Then Jasper took it up, scanned it carefully, and discussed its contents with Mr. Thorpe, but nothing was said of the "Kingfisher's Nest."

Had the unsigned verses attracted the attention of either, she might possibly have avowed them. As it was, she carried away the paper with a sense of disappointment; confirmed in her reticence.

Yet Edith took the hint of her Quaker friend. The poems were accepted, others followed at intervals, and, after a time, not only poems, but tales by "Alkald" had passed beyond the narrow limit of local publication.

Between courtship and authorship two new elements had entered into Edith's life, breaking up its barren monotony, and,

although naturally less demonstrative and exuberant than Dora, it seemed as if she had quenched her thirst at some vivifying spring, so light was her step, so clear her smiling countenance.

And what of Martin Pickersgill? Miss Vasey heard from him once or twice, and so did John Danson, but he seemed to have drifted out of the current of Giggleswick life, and his name was rarely mentioned. Strange to say, Mr. Thorpe, with all his studies and pre-occupation, appeared to miss him the most. He, too, received an occasional letter, but letters could not supply the place of the agile and intelligent companion on the hillside, or by the ingle, and there were times at which the very presence of Jasper appeared to irritate him, as a reminder of one who should have been there and was not.

Winter wore itself out; the cuckoo came and sang its song, and made itself ready for flight. Midsummer passed and July came, and with it arrived a request from Josiah Proctor that Mr. Hartley would spare his

grandson for a few days, as Mr. Pickersgill, his ward, came of age on the fifteenth, and he wished the young men to renew their acquaintance.

It was not a very gratifying meeting. Either could have dispensed with the presence of the other. Jasper had an uncomfortable feeling that the tall, well-developed, handsome West Indian would be a dangerous rival if his wonderful black eyes and musical voice were brought to bear on a susceptible heart, if that heart should happen not to be securely his own; and if a certain little ruse of his should chance to come to light. And the distance between Giggleswick and Skipton struck him as unpleasantly short. He had fears lest the collegian might think so, and be eager to visit old friends and places. And mingled with his fears was a sort of impression that Martin looked down upon him with supercilious scorn.

If he did not, it was simply due to a larger element in his nature. The injury done by the boy years before was beneath the

contempt of the man. But with him came the remembrance of sharp agony not yet overcome or forgotten; and Jasper took good care it should not be forgotten.

He supposed they might exchange "congratulations."

"How so?" inquired Martin.

"The honours you have gained at college; and your majority! You slip the leading strings to-morrow?"

"And you?"

"Oh, I have been engaged for the last eight months to the dearest and best girl in all Giggleswick."

An icy bolt might have shot through Martin's heart. An almost imperceptible tremor ran through his frame, and set in motion the heads of the Chinese mandarins on the chimney-piece against which he leaned; and Jasper saw it.

"Do I know her?" It was a needless question. He felt that he knew her too well.

"Edith Earnshaw."

There was an upheaval of the chest, the

old dilation of the nostrils, a feeling as if he would like to strangle the smiling, self-complacent animal so coolly adjusting the corners of his stiff, high collar, in front of the glass, a strong effort at self-command, and then Martin said, coldly,

"If that be true, you may indeed be congratulated. I wish the same could be said for the lady." And without another word he left Jasper to digest his wish at leisure, and snatching his hat from a stand in the hall, the pegs whereof were polished oxen horns, strode off at a stiff pace up the town and round the Castle mount, saying, as he went, "Had it been anyone but Foxey I could have borne it! The dear, sweet girl will be sacrificed—thrown away utterly! How has she been inveigled? Was there was no one to warn her?" From all of which it was clear that either he was prejudiced by jealousy, or had a more intimate knowledge of Jasper than had their common friends, or even Jasper himself. Indeed, Jasper stood rather well with number one, and, with the exception of his

sometime freckles, had not a blemish he did not regard as a virtue, or a beauty to be cultivated.

On his way back Martin encountered Deborah, returning from church, with her arms folded firmly before her, and carrying a Prayer-book wrapped in a pocket-handkerchief. "Mr. Pickersgill," said she, stiffly, "I have been told" (she did not say by Simon Postlethwaite) "that Miss Earnshaw has promised to marry Mr. Jasper Ellis? Do you know if it is true?"

"Jasper Ellis says it," was all Martin's answer.

"Then, if she has, she has made a mistake, and will find it out to her cost some day," and Deborah contrived to give her stiff form an extra pull up.

"I am afraid she will," assented Martin, with a sigh. And so they parted, having built their hypotheses on different premises.

On the morrow, the auspicious 15th of July, Josiah Proctor was jubilant, and expected all his small household to be the same. Huge nosegays of flowers filled the

fireless grates, and stood in quaint vases on the side-tables, polished (like everything else that would take a polish) until the flowers had fainter duplicates beneath. Mrs. Ripley and Kitty had new dresses and caps for the occasion, Simon Postlethwaite rejoiced over a new suit of clothes; and so did Jasper. Mr. Proctor, no whit behind, had mounted diamond buckles on his knee-breeches, and fastened down his shirt frill with a brooch to correspond. When he was not shaking hands with somebody he was rubbing them together—talking of the "proudest day of his life," and wishing Martin all the good things the future could possibly have in store for mortal man, with the most beaming of faces. Martin, inwardly convinced that the worst the future could do had been anticipated, yet did his best to keep the lively old gentleman in countenance with his cheerful demeanour. He smiled and chatted as pleasantly as if he had never an ache, the new sore smarting terribly nevertheless.

"I should be a fool to let that insufferable coxcomb see that he triumphed over me," he thought, and, having learned his lesson of endurance before his college career commenced, he was no novice at showing a brave front to the enemy.

Archibald Thorpe was expected. Restless Mr. Proctor despatched Mr. Postlethwaite to the "Devonshire Arms" to meet him, twice before the coach was really due; and then Martin, for the first time cognisant of the agreeable surprise in store for him, saved the clerk a third journey.

It was a pity Mr. Proctor did not witness the meeting of the two friends when Mr. Thorpe stepped down from the top of the coach. He would have been delighted to see how eagerly and heartily they grasped each other's hands, how naturally the younger man relieved the elder of his carpet-bag, and offered his arm for the other to take; how many questions they mutually had to ask and answer all at once. But a question rose to Mr. Thorpe's lips which suddenly sobered both.

"I suppose you have heard about Edith?"

"Yes."

"I'm very sorry. I once thought—my lad"—and he looked into Martin's face.

"And so did I," interrupted Martin. "But it cannot be helped now."

"I suppose not," assented Mr. Thorpe, dubiously, adding, after a pause, "Women are kittle cattle. However, the lad's well enough—only—— Well, I fancied Edith would have chosen differently," and then they changed the subject.

A hospitable luncheon awaited the traveller, when the health of Martin was drunk in the lawyer's best wine; and when all was cleared away by Kitty, in a troubled flutter with some news she had heard, Mr. Proctor rang a bell communicating with the office, and Simon Postlethwaite brought up, and, with some solemnity, placed on the table before the lawyer a curiously inlaid sandalwood box, not unlike a lady's desk or workbox, and then gravely retired.

"And now to business," said Mr. Proctor,

with that peculiar brisk friction of his palms which was his pleasant preliminary, ere he took from his pocket a small bunch of keys, and, making a selection, unlocked the box.

"Have you any idea, Mr. Thorpe, why you were invited hither on this auspicious occasion?" inquired Josiah, with his hand on the closed lid.

"Why-a, why-a, surely because of the good-will I bear the young man whose launch in life we celebrate to-day."

"And also because, sir, I desired to make you acquainted with the client on whose behalf I sought to lease the Osmanthorpe colliery. He is here," and Josiah's hand was laid on Martin's shoulder.

"You don't say so! Martin, I congratulate you! The colliery is in good working order, and, when the contemplated railway is laid down, its value will be almost doubled. We shall have you in our midst now. No setting sail for Jamaica, I hope. Let us shake hands upon it."

Mr. Thorpe extended his large brown

palm across the table to clasp the dark-skinned but more delicately shaped hand of his young friend, whilst Jasper leaned forward and pricked up his ears for the answer.

"I cannot say, sir, until I am master of my own actions. Then I certainly shall return to Jamaica."

"Thank God for that!" said Jasper to himself.

"I explained to my ward and *client* this morning all that was needful for his information respecting the colliery, Mr. Thorpe. Perhaps anything further on that subject had better be deferred until he becomes acquainted with the provisions of his father's will." So saying, Mr. Proctor raised the lid of the box, and, taking out the will, closed it again on a number of papers neatly folded and tied together.

To Martin that will was a sacred document; it irritated him to have Jasper privy to its contents. But for unwillingness to annoy Mr. Proctor, he would have protested against it.

The will of Laurence Pickersgill, of Yorkshire, England, and Spanish Town, Jamaica, planter, was long and intricate, but Jasper listened with eager interest in all its technicalities, whilst Archibald Thorpe grew strangely nervous and excited as it proceeded.

The provision made for the two executors, and for his son Martin's maintenance, until he came of age, out of the indigo plantation, claimed little more than a passing thought as being liberal; but when Elihu Vasey was enjoined to convey the boy to England, and to obtain his admission into Giggleswick Grammar School, where he, Laurence Pickersgill, had been educated, Mr. Thorpe's attention was aroused and riveted. He heard the reader characterised as an honest, upright man, well acquainted with the Pickersgill family and affairs, who would surely watch over the interests of the said son, Martin; but when he came to the injunction that Josiah Proctor should "assert the boy's *rights* when he attained the age of twenty-three," Archibald started

from his seat as if he had been shot; then, catching the inquisitive look of Jasper, he sat down again, whilst Josiah read on that "those rights were not to be revealed to Martin until he was twenty-three, unless both executors should agree that it was advisable. Duplicates of all papers necessary to establish the will, their rights, and of the will itself, would be lodged with Elihu Vasey, the originals going to Mr. Proctor."

"They are *here*," said the beaming lawyer, laying his hand upon the box, "and I wish I was only at liberty to set them in force to-morrow, and to let Martin know what his rights are."

"I presume my father had good reasons for keeping me in the dark so long?"

"Sentimental reasons, nothing more, Martin. He would think differently now, were he living."

"Mr. Proctor," inquired Archibald Thorpe, drawing the other aside, and speaking in a low, agitated tone, "have *I* any knowledge of that young man's rights?"

"Possibly."

"Then you have known this all along?"

"All along. I was Laurence Pickersgill's classmate. But my lips are closed for the present. I can say no more in any way or shape—except that dinner waits," and the lawyer made a move.

"I understand," said the other. "You will encounter no opposition from me."

"So I am aware, or you would not be here to-day. You will, no doubt, also understand why we were anxious to get possession of the coalpit?"

"Yes."

"I wish I did," thought Jasper, whose ears were as thin as John Danson's. "But I'll find it out before long."

CHAPTER III.

OSMANTHORPE.

"ALL our young people are growing out of hand, friend Thorpe," observed Mr. Proctor over their afternoon wine. "Here is Martin of age to-day—long life and prosperity to him!—though he is not altogether out of hand yet—pass the decanter, Martin. And there's that long-nosed, red-headed grandson of mine" (Jasper frowned; had he said *long*-headed he would have considered it a compliment), "he will be of age in less than eighteen months, and wanting a partnership with me, and then a partnership with a wife."

"Bravo, grandfather!" cried Jasper, ex-

ultingly clapping his hands, as if to applaud. "Suppose we drink success to the two partnerships!"

"Wait till they *are* partnerships, Jasper," responded the old gentleman, drily (his keen, twinkling eyes had detected the impatient drumming of Martin's finger-tips on the mahogany, and the hard biting of his nether lip). "I don't like young people to go too fast in any way or shape, and that reminds me, Mr. Thorpe, your step-son came of age on Midsummer day—so Mrs. Statham said. She was disappointed he did not call and pay his respects to her on the occasion. I know he lost something by the omission."

"Ah, yes, sure to cut himself whichever way he turned, you know, like Jasper here. He was only with us a day, and that was devoted to business with his executors. He was all impatience to get back to his wife, who was rather in a critical condition; good-natured Mrs. Sheepshank was with her, or he could not have left."

"How was Allan when you saw him,

sir?" asked Martin. "I hope he is likely to do well."

"Whya," Mr. Thorpe deliberated, "I am afraid he is not doing so well as he ought to have done. He looked anxious and harassed, but I thought much of that might be owing to anxiety for poor Grace."

"Do you know how he means to invest the money he would carry away with him? It would be a pity if he made ducks and drakes of it for lack of an adviser," quoth the lawyer.

The heat, the dinner, and the wine, had made Jasper somewhat drowsy, the word "money" chinking in his ear seemed to rouse him.

"He carried very little money away with him; it was thought wiser to transfer it to his account in the Settle Bank, where his rents will in future be paid in; and I hear he has been drawing upon it pretty freely. Edith is afraid he has already an adviser who is no good to him; and that much of the cash he has drawn out has gone to repay loans he has had from a Mr. But-

termere," replied Mr. Thorpe. "Simple-minded Grace has let it out in her letters."

"Buttermere—Buttermere? Hah, I think Mr. Earnshaw mentioned to Mrs. Statham that he had borrowed money from a Mr. Buttermere. By-the-by, did you ever see this Mr. Buttermere? Can you tell me what he is like?"

"Why, yes," and Mr. Thorpe proceeded to describe him, adding as a rider, "Mr. Polloc thinks very highly of him, and so does Mr. Sheepshank; yet there is a good-natured, eccentric old gentleman, one of the advocates of popular education, named John Wilson, who has a singular prejudice against him."

Josiah Proctor elevated his eyebrows, rested his clasped hands on the polished table, head forward, and, looking his interlocutor full in the face, said emphatically, "*Honest John!* In that case, Mr. Thorpe, you had better counsel your stepson to have nothing to do with Basil Buttermere in any way or shape, or he will be sure to rue it. And that is a lawyer's advice, gratis."

Mr. Thorpe, who had heard just sufficient to make him uneasy, yet nothing tangible as a basis for his "counsel," would have questioned further, but Mr. Proctor gave a significant nod towards their younger companions and remained silent.

The immediate arrival of visitors, eager to congratulate Mr. Pickersgill, and spend a merry night, precluded any renewal of the topic.

In the morning, Mr. Proctor proposed that a post-chaise should be hired to carry the four to Osmanthorpe, in order that Martin might inspect the colliery, and be made accquainted with the manager and his subordinates before his return to college.

There were two demurrers put in. The first from Mr. Thorpe, "Why-a, why-a, I hardly care for another meeting with my bro—"

"I know, I know," interrupted Mr. Proctor, hurriedly. "Yet I think your presence may be desirable, and I can see that Martin here has no wish to part company with you so soon."

Martin's assent was so complete that Archibald was won over, especially when osiah suggested that Mr. Thorpe might return *viâ* Leeds, and give his stepson a hint anent his bosom friend, Mr. Buttermere.

Martin's objection was of another kind. He drew his guardian aside. "Is it absolutely necessary that your grandson should accompany us?"

The old gentleman drew his brows together, fidgeted nervously with his fingers, flicked a fly off the cuff of his coat before he replied, "Whya, not *absolutely;* but you see, Martin, life is uncertain; I might be called away before your rights were established—and—and I should like my successor to be fully——"

"I think, sir," interposed Martin, respectfully, "you are too hale and hearty to be contemplating a successsor, and, with all respect, I must say I object to have Mr. Ellis" (he did not say Jasper) "mixed up with my affairs until there be a real necessity,—at least," he added, observing a cast of pain on the other's face, "not whilst he remains

under articles in another solicitor's office."

"Hah! well, that is certainly a reason, though it had not occurred to me," assented Josiah, not at all too briskly.

Nevertheless, that was the only reason he assigned to Jasper for a change in their programme, and the intimation that he had better spend the remainder of his holiday in Skipton.

Had the kindly lawyer known how bitter he was against Martin, or how he would occupy his leisure, he might have spared both Mrs. Ripley and Simon Postlethwaite some uneasiness, and terminated the holiday. Jasper spent too much time with Kitty to please Mrs. Ripley, and too many hours in his grandfather's private office to satisfy Simon Postlethwaite.

The turnpike road between Wakefield and Barnsley did not approach Osmanthorpe within two or three miles, and the bye-lane was not in the best condition. Fragments of coal scattered here and there showed that it had "been cut up by coal-waggons, and left to chance for repair," as Mr. Proc-

tor remarked to his companions, after the grumbling postilion had been dismissed, to await them at the "King's Head" in Barnsley.

From that lane the pedestrians turned into another equally rutty and dusty, and once or twice had to keep well aside whilst a string of loaded carts rumbled on their way, each leaving its tribute of slack for the behoof of the black road. Then they passed through the village; an irregular collection of colliers' huts—they were nothing more—which, although built of stone, and originally solid, had lapsed into dilapidation from neglect, comfort and decency having been alike disregarded. A clear spring bubbled up by the wayside, and ran away from the village westward, making music as it went. That it was appreciated was shown by the clean floors and well-washed bits of window-blinds in the bulk of the huts. But the cesspools and garbage reeking in the summer sun, almost before the doors where little children played, and women gossiped, made the more dainty visitors turn their

heads, and fall back upon their handkerchiefs in disgust.

There were not many people about; women and young children were alike down in the pit, or in bed, resting from the dark labour of the night. A few ducks waddled in the miry pools, a hen or two scratched up the soil for their chicks, and here and there strutted a magnificent gamecock full in view of his admiring harem, or shrilled a defiance to the surly bull-dogs and terriers lurking about.

There was an apology for an inn at the end of the village, within sight of the black wooden skeleton framework and engine-house which marked the pit shaft. About two hundred yards away stood a more respectable house, where lived the viewer. The abode of the manager was on the turnpike road, nearer to Barnsley.

From that road the descent had been gradual, Osmanthorpe lying in a wooded hollow among low hills, with a stream winding in and out, to be lost in a lakelet within

the grounds, and find an outlet on the other verge.

There were men loitering about the engine-house, who touched their caps to Mr. Proctor, and looked curiously at Mr. Thorpe, and one old fellow, bent double, and leaning on a stick, peered as curiously into the face of Martin, and plucked an aged companion by the sleeve, with nods and becks and whisperings.

Manager and viewer were speedily on the spot. Martin was introduced, there was an adjournment for business and refreshment to the house of the viewer, and then it was proposed that Mr. Pickersgill should descend into the pit.

At the engine-house flannel suits were provided for Mr. Thorpe and Martin; Mr. Proctor remained above ground, and then, accompanied by manager and viewer, they entered the basket, and were gradually lowered into the bowels of the earth, or, as Martin observed, "into the very depths of the bottomless pit."

It did not change his opinion much to see brawny men cowered on their hams, working stark naked, with young girls and little children also at work in attendance on them, to witness the brutality of the strong towards the helpless, and hear the coarse language of all, too common to be restrained by the presence of visitors, even though the visitor was named as the new owner. Decorum seemed of less import than the customary gratuities for drink. Long before he had come to the surface, Martin Pickersgill had registered a vow that he would endeavour to do away with this state of things as soon as he was fully his own master.

Manager and viewer shrugged their shoulders when, on coming to bank, he expressed his views.

These things always had been, always would be, they said. If he attempted an innovation, the colliers themselves would be the first to resent it. The earning of every child were reckoned on by the parents—ay, from three years of age. The pitman's

dog was better fed and cared for than his child.

"Infamous! infamous!" cried Martin. "The slaves on our West Indian plantation are better off than these free-born Britons!" and his lip curled with indignation. "There the *little* children, at least, can rollick about in the sun, or dabble in the streams, before they come under the lash of the taskmaster. *I* can remember playing with the children of my black nurse."

Whereupon Mr. Thorpe began to descant on the need of education for the people.

"And legislation," put in Martin.

"Yes, but, as Honest John says, 'education and legislation must go together, or we shall do more harm than good,'" replied Mr. Thorpe.

Mr. Proctor having, meanwhile, ascertained that the Squire and his hopeful son had left Osmanthorpe early in the morning to attend a prize-fight at some distance, Mr. Thorpe raised no objection to the proposal that Martin should walk through the grounds and have a view of the old hall,

as he certainly would have done had his brother Robert, the so-called "Squire," been at home.

Osmanthorpe was a fine demesne, undulating, well wooded and watered, although there were signs of the ruthless axe among the trees, and no fresh planting to repair the ravage. The lake was overgrown with weeds, and, but for the running stream which coursed through it, would have become a stagnant pond. Fences were broken, grass was rank, and overspread the paths; the drives were rutty and uneven. The like neglect was visible as they neared the hall. Cattle were browsing on what had once been a trim lawn, and the fine Tudor mansion was fast falling to decay. It was certainly not in ruins, but in that stage of neglect to which dilapidation must inevitably succeed if not speedily arrested.

From a dark yew-tree walk they emerged upon the lawn in front of the house.

No sooner did Martin run his eye over the building than he ejaculated, as one waking from a dream,

"Why, there was a picture of this place hung up in my father's room! He said he had painted it when he was a boy, and that it was his English home!"

Mr. Thorpe and Mr. Proctor exchanged glances.

"But he did not call it 'Osmanthorpe;' he called it, if I remember rightly, 'Pickersgill Hope.'"

"Ah, no doubt," assented Josiah, lightly. "There is a general likeness in Tudor architecture, and Pickersgill Hope did resemble this place very closely. I see where the difference is—if you, with your memory of a picture, do not. By-the-by," he added, jauntily and indifferently, "do you know what became of the picture?"

"Really, I do not, unless Mr. Vasey has preserved it," answered Martin, whilst Mr. Thorpe walked on thoughtfully by his side.

It was a stiff walk from Osmanthorpe to Barnsley. Nothing to Martin or Mr. Thorpe, but much to the elder man, and long before they reached Barnsley and the "King's Head," Josiah was inclined to grum-

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ble because the post-chaise had been dismissed.

He was not ordinarily a grumbler, and either he must have been unaccountably fatigued, or have had some object in checking Martin's frequent recurrence to the resemblance of Osmanthorpe Hall to the picture of "Pickersgill Hope."

After a night's repose, Martin and Mr. Proctor took leave of Mr. Thorpe, the post-chaise being in waiting to carry them back to Skipton, prior to Martin's return to Cambridge.

There was something peculiar in the parting of the latter and Archibald Thorpe. They wrung each other's hands, and seemed at a loss for words. "God bless you, Martin, and keep your heart and soul uncontaminated! I hope we shall have many a botanising ramble together before my limbs grow too stiff to climb the hills."

"I hope so, too; God bless *you*, sir! You will not forget to give my—my—kind regards to my friends at Ivy Fold."

Mr. Thorpe did not return to Ivy Fold

immediately. He spent a day or two in Barnsley, and called to see Thomas Lister. Though he cared little for poetry, he admired the sturdy character of the poetical naturalist, and was interested in his collection of birds, birds' eggs, and other matters.

When at length he did reach Leeds, he wished he had not loitered. Mr. Proctor's advice could then be of little service. Allan had signed a deed of partnership with Basil Buttermere only the previous day; and, notwithstanding the obvious delicacy of Mrs. Earnshaw, preparations were going on busily in their showy home for the christening of the three-weeks-old baby, to which Mr. Buttermere was to stand sponsor and nominee.

A baby born and a partnership completed, and no intimation of either to relatives!

CHAPTER IV.

MISCHIEF-MAKERS.

"NOT a line to Edith or myself!" He was not a naturally choleric man, but it was a slight Mr. Thorpe was not disposed to overlook; and he left the house never to enter it again.

It was in vain Allan had said that he had written a few days after his boy was born, and should have asked Edith to be godmother but for her prejudice against his partner.

Had he thought of adding that Mr. Buttermere had taken his letter to post, Mr. Thorpe might not have replied as he did.

"If you had written, sir, we should have had the letter; and, let me tell you, Edith

is not the only person prejudiced against your new partner. I came to Leeds expressly to caution you to be wary in your transactions with him."

"Yes, there are always busybodies to pick holes in a man's coat," answered Allan, sharply. "Even Mr. Wilson must have a fling at Basil, and I'm sure a better fellow does not exist. I should have got on very badly without him. Ay, Mr. Wilson absolutely came to set Grace against him, and disturb the dear girl. I hate mischief-makers!"

Perhaps, had Allan known what a mischief-maker he had himself inadvertently been, he would have spoken his mind less emphatically.

As it was, his stepfather applied the phrase "mischief-maker" to himself, and, taking up his hat, was gone without a second look at the wonderful baby, or further parley with the wondering share-broker of a day.

As years before he had turned his back indignantly on Osmanthorpe and his own

brother, so now he turned his back on Allan. He had overlooked the clandestine marriage, had submitted to rudeness and insult from Mr. Metcalfe in his intercession for the young couple, but this crowning indignity he would not brook.

A child born, a partnership arranged, a baptism coming off, and not a line to kith or kin, and he dubbed a mischief-maker for a word of advice which all he had seen convinced him was not out of place! Allan had taken the reins in his own hand—if he drove to destruction, it would be his own fault.

As he surmised, intelligence of the child's birth had been immediately communicated to Mrs. Statham, but no intimation of a projected partnership, or the name to be conferred on the boy. She had herself suggested that he should be called Theodore, and had accompanied the request with a substantial present for the purchasing of a christening robe, a silver coral and bells, and a drinking-cup, both later to be engraved with the appointed name. Her indignation,

on learning that her request had been disregarded, was only to be estimated by the old lady's affection for her own prenomen, and the slight with which her condescension had been met.

She was not much better pleased when, at a later date, she learned that the child had been christened Basil Theodore. It was quite as great an offence to give the Basil precedence, even had it been the name of a good man—which she doubted. She had not forgotten or forgiven his connivance at Allan's wedding.

No letter from Allan, long delayed, had been received at Ivy Fold, and Edith, unwilling to admit the possibility of intentional indignity, yet felt the neglect very keenly. That he should wantonly insult Mr. Thorpe by calling him a busybody and a mischief-maker, was almost beyond credibility. Allan must be woefully changed. She wrote to him for an explanation. No answer came to her letter. She wrote again with the same result, and then Allan, the chivalrous brother, who was to have

been all-in-all to her, was wept over as one of the lost.

Edith's letters *had* been answered, but at the office, the answers taken with business letters to the post by Ellison the clerk and abstracted.

Something had, however, reached the Fold in Mr. Thorpe's absence—a box, of good size, of foreign wood and construction, which, being opened, was found to contain the long-promised West Indian plants, properly labelled with their local designations. It was a perfect treasure to Archibald, and brought Edith an influx of visitors to entertain, every botanist in the neighbourhood being invited to inspect and debate thereon.

There was also, neatly folded up and addressed to Miss Earnshaw, a separate parcel, which some instinct prompted her to open in her own room. It contained an elegantly-bound copy of Moore's Irish Melodies, with Sir John Stevenson's music, a work but newly published. On the fly-leaf was written, "Miss Earnshaw, with a true friend's best wishes." There was no

signature, and none was needed. But a red rose-bud, crushed though it was, opened the volume where it had been placed as a mark. "Farewell, but if ever you welcome the hour," is well known. She read it through, but a mist seemed to come over her eyes as she followed the last stanza.

"Let Fate do her worst; there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past which she cannot destroy,
Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.
Long, long be my heart with sweet memories filled;
Like the vase in which roses have once been distilled:
You may break, you may shatter, the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still."

The crushed rosebud had ineffaceably stained the concluding lines, and made them doubly significant. And, as if to point the whole, a loose scrap of paper was enclosed. It had been cut from a magazine, and contained a poem entitled "The Voice of the Wayside Well," signed "Alkald."

Waves of memory and emotion came sweeping in full tide over Edith. She stood, as it were, spell-bound, with the

book before her. A voice from below recalled her to herself. "I must not think of it," she said; "it would be treason against Jasper." She folded and tied the volume up again, rose-bud and all, carried it to her mother's room, and locked it up out of her own sight and that of others.

"Jasper," said she, the following evening, to her attentive lover, who seemed restless when away from her, "are you sure it was Martin Pickersgill who played the ghost the night my dear mother died?"

The abrupt question startled him. He knew at once that Allan had told her.

"We-ll," he debated, "I only know I found his missing oil-box behind the gravestone, where it must have been dropped and have lain since that night. It was all rust, and the grass had grown round it. It must have been put into a skull to light it up, and been dropped in alarm when Solomon yelled out, and forgotten until it was past finding. I daresay the lads—for I don't suppose he was alone—fancied they had pitched it over into the bone-house with the

skull, and he kept quiet and said nothing until the lantern was wanted. And then you may remember how loth he was to have it searched for; how ready he was to go and buy a new one, as if it cost nothing, and how little fuss he made about the damage to the old thing."

(Had Jasper forgotten his own black eyes?)

"Yes, I remember, but *I* thought he was annoyed and angry."

"Oh, it was all sham, unless he was annoyed at my finding the thing hidden away."

"Then you really think it was Martin? One would hardly have suspected *him*."

"Why, who else could it have been? And it's just your whining, sentimental fellows that never do get suspected. It was Pickersgill, take my word for it!"

She did take his word for it, and that word extinguished the faint light of truth dawning in her soul.

"Father," said she to Mr. Thorpe the next day, "Mr. Pickersgill has sent me a book.

I suppose you would not like me to return it?"

"Certainly not."

"And—a—I would rather not accept it."

"And pray why not?"

"Well, I do not think Jasper——"

"Jasper be ——!" It was not a polite word which followed.

"Then would you, please," said Edith, timidly, "acknowledge the volume, and say just a civil word of thanks for me?"

Mr. Thorpe nodded, fully resolved to thank the giver heartily, but, when his own letter of thanks was written, he had so much to say of the plants received, and their scientific classification, and of Osmanthorpe colliery, that Edith's message was clean forgotten, and so the wound in Martin's breast was unintentionally deepened.

There were changes at Well Bank about this time, which should be chronicled.

As the elder boarders dropped off no effort was made to replace them. Mrs.

Cragg grew more infirm, and there was another helpless mortal on the hands of Miss Cragg and Miss Vasey. Mrs. Cragg's brother, the father of Ann Vasey, had come to spend his last days with them. He had travelled much, was a profound linguist, but of the fourteen languages once so fluent on his lips he had not the free use of one. Paralysis had been a greater foe to him than to Solomon Bracken.

He was a very old man, had been long in France, had been there during the Reign of Terror, and held many opinions untenable in orthodox and monarchical England.

At his request Mrs. Cragg's doors were opened to one against whom they had been persistently closed. Long-limbed Thomas Clapham, who had also been in Paris when himself and the century were young, was now a frequent visitor, for so the old man willed—Miss Cragg was too politic to remonstrate—and somehow the pair got on wonderfully together, though James Vasey was scarcely intelligible to others.

He must have known of Mr. Clapham's early pretensions to his daughter. Perhaps he considered that wisdom had come with years, and that the two were beyond the matrimonial pale; but Thomas Clapham had not thought so, and Ann, who had listened to him readily enough when she was young, had some difficulty to evade him now.

For many years James Vasey had been tyrannised over by a despotic and designing housekeeper, who had refused his kith and kin admittance, and persuaded the helpless invalid that he was forsaken and neglected. A friend had so found him, had broken the bonds he could not break himself, and borne him to his sister.

It was only to die. Many months had not elapsed before Ann Vasey went into the garden to put the customary crape on the bee-hives, and to warn the little inmates that her father was sleeping ready for Hornby churchyard.

But here, before he died, when, in the last stage of imbecility, he revoked a will made in his full senses, moved thereto, no

doubt, by the kindness and attention of those around him. He divided the remnant of a once considerable property between his daughter, Ann Vasey, and his niece, Elizabeth Cragg—leaving an only son out in the cold, an only son who spoke of undue influence on a feeble mind.

It was no great matter in the way of fortune, but it made Esther Cragg easy about her daughter's future, and it certainly served to lift Ann Vasey out of the state of dependence—if that could be dependence which kept the little lady at work with head or hands from early morning until night—with scarcely a Sabbath on Sunday.

Mrs. Cragg did not long survive her brother, and when Jasper Ellis came of age in December, 1836, and, quitting Lawyer Hartley's office, was summoned to Skipton by his grandfather, he had one friend the less to say farewell to, and the bee-hives were again in mourning.

John Danson left Giggleswick the same day, but *he* did not count. There had never been much love lost between the

twain. It had never been to Jasper's interest to cultivate John's friendship; and he more than suspected him of correspondence with Martin Pickersgill. John Danson had cared little for anyone but William Hartley after Martin was gone, and their leave-taking in Apple-Tree Hall was a very serious affair indeed, only relieved by the promise to write frequently, and never to forget their old school-days together.

Quite as serious was Jasper's parting with Edith. He had called in all his outstanding loans with the interest thereon (loans which had become heavier as the borrowers and lender advanced in age), and he had the satisfaction of taking a pretty well lined purse away with him, including a handsome present from the liberal lawyer as a parting testimony to his clerkly qualities and legal service. But he could not take Edith away with him; and she had grown day by day so very dear, so essential to his existence, that the pain of parting was more than he could endure.

Something of this he was saying as he held her in a close embrace the night before his departure, when Dora, coming on the pair unawares, cried, saucily as ever,

"Why, you might be going away to the end of the world instead of fifteen miles! I shall be glad to get rid of such a plague, and sing 'Oh, be joyful,' when you are gone, I know; and Tippie will purr with delight. Won't you, Tippie?" and the girl's bright face was held close to that of pussy, coiled in her arms, and purring in response.

To Edith also the coming parting seemed formidable. Jasper could be wonderfully winning when he liked, and, though it cannot be said he had won his way into her affections with love-gifts (as many a girl is won), he had insensibly taken a place in her heart he had scarcely hoped to occupy. She contemplated the long, dreary evenings to come, when there would be neither Jasper nor Mr. Thorpe by the fireside (the latter so often an absentee); and, as the great tall

clock burred out its note of warning ere it struck the hour of eight, in advance of the church clock and bell, she felt a strange foreboding of some evil, some sharp pang to follow his departure, but was ashamed to give voice to her fears.

Dora's saucy speech called forth a like reply from Jasper, and, though the badinage grated on the ear and heart of sentiment, it served a good purpose.

With many a whispered hope that Edith would consent to leave Dora and be his dear wife ere long, many an oath of constancy, and an avowed intention to try old Dapple's mettle in many a gallop to Gigglesswick, Jasper yet clung to her he loved. But Edith, summoning duty to her aid, freed herself from his straining clasp, bade him good-bye with a composure she was far from feeling; and he tore himself away with a last hearty kiss, forgetting Janet and Dora altogether.

Edith, with her brief knowledge of Leeds, dreaded for Jasper the temptations of London, when he should go up to be ex-

amined and entered on the Rolls. There were temptations nearer at hand which had come neither into his dreams nor hers.

CHAPTER V.

CALCULATIONS.

I AM afraid Edith had accepted Jasper very much upon credit. He stood well in general opinion, and in Miss Cragg's; Allan and he had been good friends, and it followed that he must be estimable.

But had she known how much calculation had to do with his habits of neatness and economy, whence they came, and whither they were tending, she would have had fewer apprehensions of danger to him from the unknown allurements of the metropolis.

Wherever he went, or whatever he did, was with the intention of getting as much advantage as he could at as little cost. Thus, even his devotion to her was balanced by his

assiduity and determination to learn all Lawyer Hartley had to teach.

When the London mail-coach landed him at the "Bull and Mouth," his first business was to find a cheap lodging in a retired nook out of Holborn, for which he made a close bargain, his next to present himself, with not a thread awry, to his honoured grandfather's legal agents, Messrs. Ferret, of Gray's Inn, who had instructions to facilitate his progress in all ways. He thus obtained admission to the Law Library, and gave to dry and musty tomes the hours other candidates gave to pleasure. It cost less, and was likely to be more profitable in the long run. Not that he denied himself recreation, but his tastes were inexpensive and characteristic. Messrs. Ferret, disposed to be courteous to Josiah Proctor's grandson and future partner, invited him to their bachelor home, and, at his wish, obtained orders for him to go over the Mint, the Bank of England, and the Tower, but otherwise he said he had not come to London to waste much time in sight-seeing.

And when, his examination over, and himself duly enrolled among the solicitors of the realm, he kept himself warm during the long, cold, outside ride from London back to Leeds by calculating how much he had contrived to save out of the sum his less niggardly grandfather had allowed for his expenses; and by the addition of the sum to another hoard lying perdue in his box at Skipton, and finding that he had scraped together pretty nearly two hundred pounds, he began to take into consideration the best and safest investment for this nest-egg; of which Mr. Proctor had no inkling.

In the days of dear postage it was considered an insult to prepay a friendly letter, and Jasper had not encouraged correspondence even from Edith, having regard to his fourteen-pences; still letters had passed, and he had promised to call on Allan, whilst in Leeds, to ascertain if all was well with him and his, and, if possible, get at the secret of his isolation from relatives.

It was a saving maxim of Jasper's never to take a meal at his own expense, so long

as he had hospitable friends glad to receive him. He knew Allan belonged to the liberal and lavish class. Be sure he lost no time in seeking him out.

On the ground floor of a building so close to Basinghall Street as to be almost of it, were situated the offices of Buttermere and Earnshaw, Sharebrokers, as a brass-plate on the door, and a smaller one on the door-post, intimated. There was nothing flashy about it, nothing showy or pretentious, the age for that sort of thing had not quite arrived. From the wire-gauze blind in the outer office, to the bill-files and the almanac in its black frame against the wall, and the high-railed desk of the clerk, all was sober and respectable, with none of the freshness one would expect about new beginners. The same impression of age and stability was conveyed by the solid writing-table of the partners, the good but somewhat worn carpet on the floor, the ponderous metal inkstands, and the business-like chairs.

"Is Mr. Earnshaw within?"

The clerk, apparently busy with some

abstruse calculation, went on for a minute or more before he looked up, and answered, in a voice strangely resembling that of his interrogator,

"Mr. Buttermere is not in, sir!"

"I said Mr. *Earnshaw*."

"What name shall I say, sir?" said the clerk, whilst collecting and shuffling together a number of loose scrip-like papers, as if they had been a pack of cards.

What was there in the action, or in the face or attitude of the man to arrest the attention of Jasper, as he replied, "Mr. Ellis!"

"Mr.——? Beg pardon, sir," apologised the clerk, with his eye full on the stranger, and a rapid motion of his hand to the back of his ear, "but I did not exactly catch the name."

"Ellis, Mr. Jasper Ellis."

The clerk, a man who might be any age between forty-five and fifty-five, with cunning, restless, green-grey eyes, darted a quick, keen, penetrating glance at the speaker, slowly quitted his stool, moved

towards the inner door, and, opening it, announced with some emphasis, "Mr. Jasper Ellis, to see Mr. Earnshaw."

In a very unbusiness-like manner, Allan darted out of his office, both hands extended, to grasp and shake those of his visitor.

"Whya, Jasper lad! It is like a breath of fresh mountain air to see anyone from Settle! How are they all, and how are you? Come in!——But stay," said he, as if with a second thought, "you would like to see Grace, and if we make haste we shall be in time for dinner——Ellison," turning to the watchful clerk, "when Mr. Buttermere comes in, say I have gone home. If I am not back this afternoon, say we shall be glad if he will come and spend the evening with us."

"Can you spare the afternoon from your business, Allan?" put in Jasper, when they were out in the street. "Do not neglect that on my account; you need not stand on ceremony with me."

"Oh, business will not be neglected, my partner will take care of that. I put my

money into the concern, but I really shall have very little to do, at least with important transactions, until I have more experience. Buttermere and Ellison are old hands."

"Oh, are they? In that case, if I were you, and had brought capital into a business, I should try my best to become an old hand too, lest my cash should stick to the old hands, and never come back into mine."

Allan laughed heartily at this. "Ah, Foxey," said he, "that's just like you, you've not altered much."

Foxey, however, did not apparently relish the sobriquet; he gave the conversation another turn. "By-the-by, what did you say was the name of your clerk?"

"Ellison."

"Do you know his Christian name?"

"James, I think, he signs Jas. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, he reminds me of some one I knew when a child, that was all."

Then they talked of other matters. Allan, so it appeared, was indignant that he never

heard from Ivy Fold except through his wife, and would not credit the story that no letters had been received from him for more than six months. "I wrote at Christmas, I know, thinking animosity should die out then," insisted Allan. "But I never got an answer. And, if they can do without me, I can do without them!"

Mrs. Earnshaw would have been better pleased to see Allan had she been better prepared. Influenza was then fatally epidemic in the town; and her darling baby was only just recovering. This was her apology for the cold dinner on the table, for her own curl-papers, and printed morning wrapper, and some disorder in the showily-furnished apartment. There was a hurried exit, a hasty improvising of something savoury in the kitchen below, and as hasty a toilette overhead; and then along with the dinner came in Grace in a dress as little fitted for nursing a sick child as her soiled morning wrapper had been to receive a visitor.

The baby claimed much of the mother's

attention in the afternoon. In the evening, Basil Buttermere arrived, along with his wife, a timid, retiring sort of woman, who busied herself about the baby, whilst her husband began to talk business with Allan, and descant on the respective values of different railway shares in the market, the great advantages of railway scrip over every other form of investment, and the certainty of the investor who came to their office turning over his money more quickly and more profitably than anywhere else. They apparently possessed facilities for obtaining the earliest information from London, and all headquarters, such as no other office had; and the railroad was the only certain and swift road to fortune.

Jasper listened, chimed in now and again, put a number of questions, remarked that when he was Mr. Proctor's partner he might be in a position to introduce clients; but, although Basil Buttermere had dazzled his eyes with the auriferous prospect of railway dividends, he said not one word of the

money he had to invest. The face of their clerk, Ellison, had scared him. It had revived a host of old and not too pleasant memories.

Yet he quitted Leeds so favourably impressed with Basil Buttermere as a straightforward, shrewd, business man, one not likely to be taken in, that he quite hesitated and debated whether he could do better than invest his small savings in scrip, to be again sold at a premium under the auspices of Buttermere and Earnshaw. Only the face of the clerk deterred him; and that haunted him like an unpleasant dream.

"I think I baited my hook well," quoth Basil to himself as he walked home, not to Hunslet, but to another and larger house in close proximity to Allan's. "I shall land the gudgeon and a shoal with him."

"Humph!" muttered the clerk to himself, "he seems in pretty good feather, though not much to pluck at yet, I reckon."

Very proud was Josiah Proctor of the

report Messrs. Ferret had made concerning his grandson, and very well pleased that he had not exceeded his allowed expenses—of any saving out of that allowance he was unaware. He lost little time in drawing up a deed of partnership, so favourable to the young man in all respects that, when it was duly signed and sealed, Jasper began to calculate on his marriage with Edith as a natural and almost immediate conclusion.

Mounted on Dapple he rode over to Settle, scarcely grudging the turnpike tolls in his elation, and in a rapture of delight laid his prospects and his hopes before Edith as they sat together in the recess window-seat, Dora being at school.

"Grandfather is quite willing that I should marry before the year is out, and settle down in the old house with him, unless we should prefer a new one of our own. But I think he must be growing lonely, and that we young people would help to renew his youth; and, besides, there is a house ready furnished to our hands. What say you, Edie dear?"

He had made his suggestion adroitly. Edie had lived amongst old-fashioned furniture all her days, she did not see any objection to his plan, but, what was more to the point, she said,

"Jasper, this is idle talking. You promised you would wait for me; and you know I cannot desert Dora until she is old enough to take my place, and steady enough to take care of herself. I should break my word to my dead mother otherwise."

"Whya, you were very little older than she is when you had to nurse your mother and take care of her too! My darling, you do not surely mean to sacrifice my happiness and your own to that child. It is absurd. Let Mr. Thorpe get a housekeeper. He cannot expect you to remain single all your life for him."

Edith shook her head.

"He does not expect it, but duty binds me all the more. He is as unfit to be left to the mercy of strangers as is Dora. And dear Dora—a harsh word would almost

kill her. No. I cannot leave my sister this year—or next."

"Then it is very certain you think more of Dora than of me!" he replied, with some warmth, and, rising from her side, began to pace the room, throwing out similar interjections which wounded deeply, none the less that she was conscious she had not met his raptures with like ecstasy.

"I shall speak to Mr. Thorpe," said he, moving towards the study door.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Jasper," and the words fell from her lips with quiet decision, as she threw herself before him. "Duty is more imperative than self. If I forswore myself and forgot my duty here, how could I dare to look for happiness with you? How could you expect me to be more dutiful as a wife? No, Jasper dear, we must be content to wait. And besides, you will have business enough on your hands for a while, without a wife."

He went back in anything but an amiable frame of mind. Her decision not only

withheld from him a wife, but the three thousand five hundred pounds of which Edith was now mistress.

CHAPTER VI.

IN PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE.

BEFORE the partnership was a month old, Mr. Proctor made the discovery that his new partner was not altogther an acquisition. As a conveyancer of long standing, he had a good and extensive practice, but old clients did not care to entrust their business to so young a man; they preferred sober Simon Postlethwaite, although Josiah missed no opportunity to introduce his grandson, and laud his legal attainments. His shrewdness and ability, joined to natural powers of fascination, made themselves felt in course of time, and he brought in new clients of his own; but before the ink was well dry upon the parch-

ment, and whilst Jasper was galloping to meet disappointment in Giggleswick, Josiah's friend and neighbour, Mrs. Statham, had despatched Deborah to summon her solicitor to disappointment of another kind.

Fido, having wakened up for the summer season, had made his first appearance in the parlour, and Mr. Proctor almost stumbled over him on the very threshold. His "Good day, Mrs. Statham," was drowned by the shrill voice of Poll, triumphantly discordant over a new acquirement. "The grinning imp! the grinning imp! Not a penny! Not a penny! Not a penny of my money shall pass through his hands! Pass through his hands! The grinning imp! Not a penny!" to the great satisfaction of Mrs. Statham and the discomposure of the genial lawyer, who wondered what it all meant.

It meant that Poll had blurted out at second-hand that which Poll's irate mistress had been iterating half the morning, in jerky fits and starts. And Mr. Proctor arrived at some such conclusion when, the

noisy parrot and his cage being removed that Mrs. Statham might hear her own voice, he was informed, with little more courtesy or ceremony, that, unless he could transact her business without the intervention of his grandson, and keep her papers and affairs as private as they had hitherto been kept, she should withdraw them from his charge. And, lest he should be under any misapprehension, she intimated that she knew Simon Postlethwaite had been duly articled in his youth, if only on a £60 stamp, and was qualified to act as her attorney, and that, if money was wanting to pay the fine for the full stamp, and to place him on the Rolls, she would not hesitate to find it if necessary.

"I can trust you, Josiah Proctor, to the last gasp, but I'll not trust that long-headed grandson of yours, who makes love to my grandniece and my guineas in one. . . . So I warn you, keep my affairs out of his hands, or I take them out of yours. Eugh! The grinning imp!" she ejaculated, in conclusion.

It was no use attempting to turn Mrs. Theodora Statham when she had resolved. No use suggesting that Jasper was a mere boy when he laughed at her bald head.

"Tsha! Don't tell me. Do men gather grapes off thorns, or figs off thistles?"

Another intimation of a like nature came from Josiah's ward, and if couched in more polite and delicate language, in the form of suggestion rather than command, Mr. Proctor felt himself in honour equally bound.

It was an unpleasant task to lay these intimations before the young partner, but, as Josiah did not propose any reduction of Jasper's share of the profits, the latter affected to make light of the want of confidence in himself, although in his first irritation he could not help exclaiming,

"It's just Pickersgill's jealousy, and nothing else. He wanted Edith, you see, and I've won her. And this is his mean revenge."

"Wanted Edith, did he? Hah!" and Mr. Proctor's hands went slowly over one another as he thought the matter out.

It became necessary to provide Mr. Ellis with a separate office instead of the contemplated seat in his own, and, there being a door of communication between the front and back office (in which Simon Postlethwaite had spent the best years of his life amongst an accumulation of old papers and legal forms), it was decided to transfer the clerk to a front room on the opposite side of the hall, hitherto set apart for waiting clients, and to fit up the back office for Jasper's accommodation.

To say that Mr. Ellis was content with this arrangement is insufficient. Nothing could have pleased him better. He had some notions strongly at variance with his grandfather's mode of progression, and if he was to make money as he had learned that it was to be made, he should require a private room where his letters were open neither to question nor inspection, and—well, his inherent curiosity had received a fillip, and the door between the two rooms was suggestive.

Imperturbable Mr. Postlethwaite regarded

the change with no favour; it was a disturbance of old ideas and associations, as well as of unsuspected dust; nevertheless, it was his master's will, and he submitted with tolerably good grace. Whatever objection he made was in the ear of Deborah Gill, and that was as the cave of silence.

The change was not effected as rapidly as Jasper could have wished. Simon lingered so long and affectionately over the papers on every shelf and in every pigeon-hole before he effected a fresh arrangement to his satisfaction, and was so persistent in the performance of his daily duties also, that Jasper voluntarily, and, as Simon thought, officiously—came to his assistance, notwithstanding the peril to his garments from dust.

Simon's quiet demurrer was unnoticed or unheeded. Mr. Proctor was pleased to see Jasper so energetic and business-like, and the junior flicked the loose dust off bundles of papers, and ran his eye over their endorsements with a rapidity disconcerting to the jog-trot clerk.

In the midst of their work, a paper fell from a bundle. Simon was leaving the room with a basket full of such, and did not observe—Jasper did little more than glance at it, but into his pocket went the paper, and not back into the bundle.

In the privacy of his own chamber, when the household was at rest, did Jasper go over and ponder that paper. It was the draught of a will made by Theodora Statham, formerly of Whitby, and now of Skipton, spinster, by which all her former wills were revoked, and the whole of her property, barring a legacy of £500 to her faithful maid, Deborah Gill, was devised to her grand-niece and namesake, Theodora Thorpe. There was no mention of Edith, no mention of Allan. Dora and Deborah were the only persons named—yes, there was a mourning ring for his grandfather, that was all; and the property, roughly estimated, was worth upwards of £30,000.

Edith's few thousands sank into paltry insignificance!

Over and over the will he went. There was not a flaw in it. The date, as well as he could recall, was the day on which Edith and Dora were packed off home in disgrace, and Edith had not been taken into favour since. Yes, that must be Mrs. Statham's last will!

How the freckles stood out on his white face, like so many money-spots, as he repeated to himself, "Thirty thousand pounds at the very least, and I have been more than eleven years saving and scraping together two hundred!" and he got up and walked about his bed-room, regardless how wastefully the unsnuffed candle was guttering and flaring away.

"And all to go to that chit, that wax doll, that little tigress, the spoiled child to whom Edith is sacrificing her own life—and *mine*. But I won't stand it. Edith must either give up her fantastic sentiment, and let us get married before long, or——" He broke off. "I shall hate that Dora—I know I shall," and he stripped off his coat

and waistcoat savagely, flinging them down in utter contravention of his own nice and methodical law of order.

"And there's that sentimental Signor Pickersgill, got a plantation and a colliery, and no one knows what besides, whilst I've been pinching to save pence and shillings. But he's not got Edith, that's one good thing," he muttered, as he tumbled into bed, and tossed his pillows about in discontent. "Neither have I, for that matter," he went on. "But I shall have before long, and I'll know what the wonderful 'rights' of Mr. Pickersgill are before long, too, or my name's not Jasper Ellis. Why should either Dora or he be rich, and Edith and I poor, I should like to know?"

The question was not to be answered, but, along with the thirty thousand pounds, haunted him like so many goblins through the long, wearisome night. Ay, and for many a day and night, warping still further a mind which had already an unhealthy bias.

In his feverish eagerness to accumulate

coin he let no opportunity slip. His diligent application to business excited the admiration not only of Mr. Proctor, but of Simon Postlethwaite, and *his* approbation, being unusual, travelled far.

He got a good name for himself in another direction. More than one poor debtor, pressed by a ruthless creditor, found a friend where least expected, and was enabled to keep a house together, or himself out of gaol by a temporary loan from the young lawyer, always unknown to his senior partner, and always on heavy interest; thus his two hundred pounds went through the multiplication table rapidly and secretly. But even this was too slow a process for Jasper. He heard from Allan, as well as from clients in the office, horse-dealers and cattle-buyers in the market-place, and around the inn doors, and he read in the *Leeds Mercury*, to which Josiah pinned his faith, how railroads were on the increase, and what a demand there was for shares in this or that new line; but though, like Cassius, he had an itching palm, and he

envied the men who were said to be making money like coining, his own gold stuck to his fingers, and he hesitated to make the first plunge.

Yet he did not hesitate to plunge into other and unknown waters, dark and troubled, and with never a landing-place that was not peopled with threatening shadows.

From the day that Lawrence Pickersgill's will had been read, and re-placed in the sandal-wood box in his presence, Jasper's innate curiosity had been at work to penetrate the mystery it held. But, although his long nose and keen eye went poking and prying into all the nooks and corners of his grandfather's office, he found not even a letter relative to Martin or his "rights."

There were iron boxes filled with deeds and documents, duly labelled; presses crammed with papers neatly folded and docketed; pigeon-holes gorged with packets of correspondence; shelves on which law-books and ledgers disputed precedence with newer Acts of Parliament; and there was the great,

unwieldy desk at which his grandfather usually sat, but the iron boxes were locked, and the big ugly desk.

Amongst the heterogeneous litter he had accumulated through his habit of picking up and preserving neglected waifs and strays, he had quite an assortment of keys; bent, broken, useless, save as old metal—still he had a tolerable bunch with no defect beyond rust.

Evil suggests evil, else why did the locked desk prompt him to wish he had those old keys at hand?

They were not at hand, however, and he went back to Settle no wiser, and it is possible he might have forgotten the box and its secret, had he continued with Mr. Hartley.

He had been reminded, not too pleasantly, when he was told that Mr. Pickersgill's affairs could not pass through his hands, or Mrs. Statham's either; and from that hour an unconquerable curiosity took possession of him.

It so chanced that an important meeting

of West Riding colliery proprietors was to be held at Barnsley on the 14th December, which a few local geologists had been invited to attend.

On the previous Saturday, notwithstanding a dense fog which prevailed, Mr. Thorpe presented himself in Mr. Proctor's office by arrangement, in order that they might bear each other company. There must have been some little hesitation on the part of the lawyer to take the journey in weather so unfavourable, for Jasper, called in to shake hands with Mr. Thorpe, and to receive a packet sent by Edith, caught the words "Martin will be disappointed," from which he concluded that they were expecting to meet Mr. Pickersgill.

Mr. Proctor had been sitting at his desk, and the fog necessitating the use of a candle to search for some papers he required, Jasper standing on one side caught the gleam of keys in the lock, and a glimpse of the sandal-wood box within.

Between fog, candle, papers, heavy lid,

and a sudden remark from Mr. Thorpe, Mr. Proctor's attention was withdrawn from the keys.

There was an adjournment upstairs for luncheon, a spencer put on in the hall, and the two were gone.

Jasper was alone in his own room with temptation, and like Blue Beard's wife he let curiosity get the better of honour.

Ere long he was in the front office, and had the coveted box in his hand, when there was a sudden hubbub in the entrance hall, a trampling and shouting as if the market had lost its way. Down went the heavy lid of the desk with a crash and a snap. In less than a minute his own office door at the back of the hall was opened and his head thrust out to inquire the cause of the uproar. An ox, over-driven or misguided in the fog, had rushed in at the lawyer's open hall door, and a posse of men had followed to belabour the beast with sticks under the pretence of driving it forth.

Mrs. Ripley and Kitty, with the kitchen door (at the back of the stairs) half shut for fear, half open for curiosity, were screaming their loudest, and Simon Postlethwaite, his equanimity for once disturbed, vainly endeavoured to make himself heard.

Jasper was not deficient in courage ; the animal's head was close to his face. He literally took it by the horns, and, there being no room to turn, bore it backwards, aided by the drovers, who had the tail of the beast in tow.

"Warm work," said he, as he wiped his forehead, when the hall was cleared, and the clerk, to satisfy some doubt in his own mind, crossed to his master's office, opened the door, which stood ajar, and looked around.

"I thought I heard some one in this office," muttered he. "I must have been mistaken."

The fog had partially dispersed with the crowd; the dangling keys arrested his attention. In a moment the desk was locked, and

the keys were in Simon Postlethwaite's safe keeping.

Jasper Ellis had cumbered himself with a white elephant.

CHAPTER VII.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

"WARM work," indeed! Beaded drops stood on Jasper's forehead. He had taken an intrusive ox by the horns succesfully, but now he had to take an obtrusive question by the horns, and found it unmanageable. The box lay upon his office table still closed. He had ceased to think of Martin's secret, his own pressed so heavily.

With the disappearance of the keys had gone alike his chance of replacing the box or of opening its dumb lips without violence.

To abstract the container for the mere purpose of examining its contents was one thing; the retention for any purpose was

something different, and bore an ugly name.

When he opened his grandfather's desk he had not calculated on this mischance!

What should he do? Go boldly to Simon Postlethwaite and demand the keys! No, he dared not do that, Simon might question him, or withhold them. He must endeavour to obtain them by stratagem before his grandfather's return.

There was an approaching step in the hall, a tap at his door, he had barely time to conceal the box beneath an open newspaper when a client came in and kept him nearly an hour explaining a case of trespass. Others followed, and all the while he was on the rack.

All he had to think of now was to restore the box or to hide it; the secret it held was secondary, quite.

With some difficulty he fitted it into a drawer in his table emptied for the purpose, but the drawer had no fastening.

He was thankful when the time came to close the office and dismiss the clerk. Even then he was afraid to leave his secret be-

hind, lest another mischance should bring it to light.

Still more thankful was he when, Mrs. Ripley and Kitty having gone to bed, he felt himself safe to carry the box upstairs unobserved. But the office was below, the stairs creaked, and by the time he had gained the hall a light glimmered on the upper floor; a comely head, set in the deep frills of a nightcap, was thrust over the oak balustrade, and Mrs. Ripley's voice called out, "Who's there?" She had kept a rushlight burning as her master was from home.

"It is I, Mrs. Ripley, Mr. Thorpe brought me a letter to-day, which I left downstairs!"

"Oh, I thought it was thieves!" and, with quite an audible sigh of relief, the housekeeper carried back her comfortable face and nightcap to their equally comfortable pillows. "Thieves!" How the word smote him! What was *he* but a thief carrying off the property of another? But he meant to restore it. Yes, he meant to restore it.

With that tangible piece of woodwork in

his hand, he felt the *danger* and *disgrace* of his act. It never occurred to him that it was equally a theft to invade the privacy of his grandfather's desk and possess himself surreptitiously of another's secrets.

There was little sleep for him that night. Kitty was up and lighting the fires before the restless head lay still; then, as though conscience had taken an opiate, he slumbered heavily until the church bells awoke him to the consciousness that it was Sunday, and that his shaving-water was lying on the mat outside, cold and raw as the morning itself.

Ten o'clock! Who ever slept until ten o'clock in that orderly house, even on Sunday morning?

Mrs. Ripley was quite concerned, thought he must be ill, and accredited his tussle with the beast in the passage with the feverish symptoms of a restless night and a disturbed conscience.

It was too late for church, when a second breakfast was put upon the table, to go back almost untasted.

Mrs. Ripley's anxious inquiries almost suggested the plea of indisposition, and countenanced his stay indoors whilst she and Kitty went together to afternoon service at the parish church, and, falling in with Deborah Gill on the way home, had a long, confidential gossip, in which no detail was spared of the great horned beast's intrusion into the hall, and the young master's bravery; or the kind-hearted housekeeper's fears lest he had sustained some injury in the encounter, he looked so badly in the morning, or the great fright she had herself in the night, lest robbers were in the house.

Between the service and the gossip Jasper Ellis had a long afternoon to himself. A Sabbath afternoon, not given to pious books or pious contemplation, but to the oiling and filing of keys to fit the lock of a desk that was not to be fitted or opened by the amateur.

He first grew hot and red with excitement, then cold with desperation. And so Mrs. Ripley found him lying on the upstairs sofa, when she, with a sort of motherly care

for Kitty, carried candles into the room herself.

He was certainly ill, she was convinced; but he would have none of her possets or decoctions, he only wanted quiet, and to be left to himself.

And so he was left. But self just then was neither a pleasant nor a profitable companion. He was in a dilemma, had two paths before him, was not bad enough to take the one willingly, nor good enough to take the other and risk his future prospects.

Unable to decide, he drew a shilling from his pocket, sent it spinning into the air, and watched with eagerness its descent upon the table-cloth. Again and again he repeated the conjuration, and then, as if the Fates had decided for him, replaced the coin, and, leaving the candles unsnuffed and the fire unstirred, sat biting his nails and cogitating until shadows began to deepen in the room and gather round his moveless form.

Fog is not a safe or pleasant companion on a journey by rail. It was not much

safer or more pleasant to stage-coach passengers.

The vehicle had one or two narrow escapes during the first few miles; once of collision with a waggon, more than once of upset through running against a bank, or over a wayside stone; but presently they left the fog behind, or the fog politely lifted its cap as a parting salutation, for they saw no more of it. That which they took for fog as they drove through Headingley into Leeds was but the contribution of congregated chimneys to the shades of early twilight, cloth-mills and dye-works then belching forth their fumes unreservedly.

Fog and smoke were alike forgotten as the friends shook hands with Martin Pickersgill in the wide lobby of the "White Hart," and were led by him into a private room he had secured upstairs. And it is a moot point whose eyes rested with the greater pride and admiration on the fine young fellow before them, in whom the black-eyed loveliness of the southern mother and the stalwart manliness of the northern

father so blent as to give the feminine softness and beauty of the one, with the bold outlines and proportions of the other. Strength as well as tenderness was there. The pensive melancholy and languor of the boy had given place to a purposeful nobility of face and bearing, with sensitive lines and a shadowy something over all which told of a battle fought and a victory won, but also of ineffaceable scars covered up and out of sight, with which the work-day world had no concern.

Until dinner was over and waiters dismissed, conversation was, of course, desultory, but the elder gentlemen had elicited to their satisfaction that Martin's career at Cambridge had been distinguished. He did not say to them that he had worked like a galley-slave, less for the honours to be gained than to shut out thoughts that would have unmanned him. He had stuck hard to mathematics, gone in studiously for geology and mineralogy, taken to botany and boating for recreation, and had generally a good account to give of himself,

though there was nothing boastful in the manner of the teller.

"I thought," said he, "that I had better qualify myself for my position as the owner of a colliery, with human lives in my charge, than foster the romance in my nature with too close application to classical literature."

"Quite right, Martin, in every way and shape," acquiesced Mr. Proctor, "but, whilst you were about it, you might have tried your hand at practical surveying; you will find it useful some day."

"Surveying?"

"Yes, I've had a man down at Osmanthorpe surveying for me, and I have brought with me his plans of the colliery above ground and below, and I think they might be better. If you will reach me my valise I will show them to you," and into his breeches pocket went Josiah's slender fingers for his keys.

Consternation! No keys were there. No keys anywhere within his reach or ken!

Josiah rubbed his hands slowly one over the other in a perplexed effort to remember

when he had them last. He was afraid lest he had lost them in the coach. No! He recollected he had left them in his desk, and the recollection disturbed him.

"What does it matter?" exclaimed, rather than asked, Archibald Thorpe, between the whiffs of his long pipe. "I suppose you have honest people about you, and they don't let strangers into your office in your absence?"

"Of course, of course," assented the other, but his customary cheerfulness was gone, and, although Boots—with some difficulty, being Saturday night—found a locksmith to provide the valise with a fresh key, the conscientious lawyer felt that he had been guilty of carelessness amounting to a breach of trust, and laid the plans before his ward with a mind evidently astray. He at once penned a hasty letter to Mr. Postlethwaite (not to his partner), and fidgeted in and out to find an earlier conveyance than the post, remaining in a state of restlessness the whole of the night, the keys rattling and dancing before him even in his dreams.

It was a relief to all three when Mr. Proctor opened a letter from Simon Postlethwaite at the "King's Head," Barnsley, on Monday afternoon.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, "Simon found the keys close upon our departure, so that's all right! And now, Martin," he rubbed his open hands gleefully together once more as he spoke, "come along, I want to introduce you to some of your colliery neighbours before the meeting opens, and Mr. Thorpe here has a geological Quaker friend to call upon, a man who makes verses and sells linen, and goes rambling over the mountains and moorlands filling his pockets with the rubbish you both set such store by. He was in Settle this summer, on his way to the Cumberland and Westmoreland lakes, talking poetry to Miss Earnshaw, and science to Mr. Thorpe, and now our friend means to lug this Mr. Lister into the meeting by head and shoulders, if the Quaker's modesty keeps him back; and if it comes to a tussle your help may be useful, for the Barnsley poet is bigger and stronger than

either of you, and, though a man of peace, would be a bad subject to tackle in a fray."

So lightsome was Josiah now his keys were safe and all right that the swift shadow crossing Martin's face at the mention of Edith, to whom even this unknown Mr. Lister was privileged to talk poetry, passed unobserved.

That meeting of West Riding coal proprietors, presided over by a Mr. Thomas Wilson, of Barnsley, had been convened for the discussion of subjects affecting the collieries of the district, which were supposed to be labouring under disadvantages consequent on the enjoyment of certain monopolies by Northumberland and Durham, and of railway facilities for the conveyance of the precious mineral when brought to bank, a strong opinion prevailing that, until the West Riding had its railway too, half the pits would soon have to be closed. This was to be obviated by the North Midland, the bill for which had already passed. The want of scientific combination and information was also dis-

cussed, and the formation of a Geological and Polytechnic Society for the West Riding so warmly advocated that it was soon after an accomplished fact, with Earl Fitzwilliam at its head; and numbered not only Mr. Thorpe and Mr. Lister among its members, but Martin Pickersgill.

Among the topics introduced the low moral status of the colliers was brought on the carpet as a grievance by which the masters suffered. Many were the arguments advanced and remedies suggested, but none, to Martin's mind, seemed to reach the root of the matter. At length he could stand it no longer. He rose to his feet in all his fine proportions, and, though prefacing his speech with a modest apology for his interference amongst older men, before he sat down he had entered such an eloquent protest against the employment of women and children in mines as took the unprepared auditory by storm; and not only did he protest against the evil, but declared his intention to abolish the practice at Osmanthorpe without loss of time, or waiting for

legislation on the subject, although he hoped that would not be wanting, and that his hearers would themselves combine to bring about such a result.

Had a bombshell burst in their midst more confusion could not have resulted.

"Introduce him!" quoth Mr. Proctor to Mr. Lister. "The lad's introduced himself with a vengeance; and I'll warrant has made more enemies than friends! You can't interfere with vested interests and common usage in that wholesale way."

"I shall be happy to number thee among *my* friends, Martin Pickersgill, if thou be willing, and there's my hand on it; and thou mayst count on me to help thy righteous undertaking with either my voice or my pen," and a hand like a vice closed on that of Martin.

In the discussion which followed our young friend was prevented taking part, in consequence of an unexpected interruption, though the angry debate which followed his speech proved he had not thrown his thoughts to the wind.

No sooner had he ceased speaking than a bloated, red-faced man, who had bounced to his feet, and been called to order for interrupting the speech more than once during its progress, made his way to our friends, and, tapping Martin rudely on the shoulder, demanded, offensively,

"And pray, sir, who may you be, who prate of Osmanthorpe as if it belonged to you?"

Martin turned round, looked the speaker full in the face, and, with some hauteur, answered,

"The owner of Osmanthorpe colliery, sir. My name is Pickersgill."

"I'll be d——d if you are!" jerked out the other, coarsely. "You'll be for saying you're the owner of all Osmanthorpe next."

"Quite right, Mr. Robert," put in Lawyer Proctor, with a beaming face, "that is just what he will be saying, and what I am prepared to maintain. Your elder brother will bear me out."

Martin looked from one to another in amazement.

"Yes, Robert, this is Laurence Pickersgill's son and heir," supplemented Archibald Thorpe, with his hand on Martin's shoulder. "You may as well give up possession quietly."

"I'll be d——d if I do!" growled the brother of Archibald, with angry emphasis. "Though you have leagued with this rascally lawyer to defraud me, possession is nine-tenths of the law, and you've got to prove your case."

"Why, yes," assented Mr. Proctor, with incisive deliberation; "and being already in *possession* of the colliery, it only remains to put in our proofs to obtain legal possession of the whole."

"Put them in and be d——d to you!" roared the infuriated man, as he stalked off, purple with rage, and the expectation of defeat.

"Is this true?" whispered astonished Martin to Archibald Thorpe, as the crowd gathered round, with eager curiosity on all faces.

"Quite true, my lad, and it is about time

the wrong was righted; but I could have wished the disclosure had been less public, for my brother's sake."

"Why, yes; it is somewhat premature, but one cannot always choose time or place. Man proposes and God disposes. Your brother brought it on himself. I should have failed in my duty to Laurence had I not substantiated his son's rights then and there. Gentlemen,"—Josiah turned to the lingering crowd—"permit me to introduce Martin Pickersgill, the son of Laurence Pickersgill, of Jamaica, Squire of Osmanthorpe, otherwise Pickersgill Hope."

"Ay, that's the old name," cried a grey-headed man from their midst; "'twas old Thorpe changed it when Laurence was driven out. Give me your hand, young sir —I knew your grandmother."

And then there was a cheer for the rightful heir. The Thorpes, barring Archibald, were not in good odour.

CHAPTER VIII.

JASPER'S CONSCIENCE.

"MAN proposes and God disposes,"—Josiah Proctor had good reason, ere long, to remember his own words for the remainder of his life. He had spoken prematurely in the confidence of abundant documentary evidence safe under lock and key.

The scene at the recent meeting rendered it necessary to acquaint Martin with the story of his "rights" and his father's wrongs, without waiting for the arrival of Mr. Vasey's assent, which had been written for.

That very evening, in their private room at the "King's Head," in the glow of a fire

made up of Osmanthorpe coal, whilst Mr. Thorpe smoked his long pipe and threw in an occasional word, Josiah Proctor told the story to his ward, whose sensitive lips and nostrils quivered at the relation.

He then learned for the first time how his grandfather, the owner of Pickersgill Hope, and the father of Laurence Pickersgill, had married a young beauty from Weardale, and, dying three years after their marriage, had committed his young wife and infant son to the care of his wife's own brother, Oswald Thorpe, to whom also he committed the management of the Pickersgill estate for the use and benefit of his wife and son, until the infant Laurence came of age, when his guardianship was to cease; how, also, from the hour Oswald Thorpe entered upon his trust, he spoke and acted as if he were sole and absolute master of Pickersgill Hope; how he sent the boy Laurence off to Giggleswick Grammar School as soon as he was old enough to be admitted, boarding him cheaply as he could in the village. He would not hear of home-

coming for the boy, or of journeys by the mother to visit her son. And Martin heard with infinite pain how the mother broke her heart pining for her boy, and the boy well-nigh broke his over the mother he was not allowed to see, alive or dead, and how the recall of Laurence from school was the opportunity for insult and ill-usage both at the hands of Squire Thorpe, as he pretentiously styled himself, and Squire Thorpe's youngest son Robert, a chip of the old block; the eldest, Archibald, being, strange to say, little better dealt with than his cousin and companion, Laurence. That suddenly Laurence disappeared, and it was reported that he had run off to sea and died. Nothing was heard of him until, years after, he wrote to his old class-mate, Josiah Proctor, and detailed how he had been shipped to the West Indies against his will, and, falling in with Elihu Vasey, they had cast their lots together. He had been kept almost in ignorance of his own birthright, but Josiah, in the office where he was articled, had acquired the knowledge and

transmitted it to Laurence, promising to help him to his own should he ever come back to England. By that time Laurence was the husband of a wealthy Spanish girl, with no care to return to a land which had used him so unkindly. It was not until sons were born to him that he advised his friend Josiah to keep an eye on the estate, which had been already re-baptised. Knowledge of his uncle's death, and of Archibald's advertisement for his heir, must have influenced Laurence Pickersgill's will, for Archibald and he had loved one another, and he was loth to dispossess him.

"Could he have seen the riot, the waste, and the destruction on the old place, or have known that his cousin Archibald repudiated possession, I should have been empowered to claim it for you from the first, I know," was the kindly lawyer's conclusion. "But we will soon put you in possession, Martin. Mr. Thorpe here holds the title-deeds; we have already gained a foothold on the estate, and I have all the needful registers of birth and parentage—ay, and

the captain's affidavit of your father's compulsory shipment on board the West Indian trader. They are all safe under lock and key in my office."

The keys were safe, we know, but the sandal-wood box, where was that?

What a look of blank dismay seemed petrified on Mr. Proctor's face as he raised the heavy lid of his desk, some days later, and discovered his loss! With the lid held open by one hand, he gazed vacantly within for two or three minutes, then down went the lid with a crash, and he with it, the one word "*Robbed!*" coming in a gurgle from his lips, as his face fell forward on his hands, and a slight crimson stain dabbled his white shirt frills.

Word and action had been sufficiently expressive.

Martin and Mr. Thorpe darted forward simultaneously to catch him. Jasper and Postlethwaite hurried in at the cry for help.

Reverently and cautiously did the two young men carry the helpless form upstairs to a sofa, Martin comprehending less, it may

be, than Jasper, whose extreme agitation passed for natural emotion.

One moment Simon Postlethwaite lingered to lock the desk and secure the keys, and then he was scouring through the Market-place for a surgeon, at a very unwonted pace.

In a couple of days the doctor decided that no immediate danger was to be apprehended, provided always that the patient was kept perfectly quiet and silent until the ruptured blood-vessel had time to heal.

For once in his active life Lawyer Proctor evinced no tendency to speak or stir; recovery was therefore the more hopeful.

He lacked neither care nor attention. Deborah was sent to relieve Mrs. Ripley in the night season, and Martin seldom quitted him night or day. Mr. Thorpe, feeling himself perfectly useless, wandered about aimlessly, or conferred with Postlethwaite in the clerk's office on the possible nature of the robbery his master had sustained.

But no one was more watchful or anxious than his grandson. As yet Martin had no

real idea that his estate was in jeopardy, but Jasper had conscience alive within him, telling him that if his grandsire died he would be a murderer as well as a thief. Yet it never stirred him to restore the sandal-wood box. It could only be done by a confession of his untrustworthiness, which would bring obloquy and ruin upon himself, and probably injure his grandfather's practice also. No, he must stand to his deed, and find some way to account for the disappearance. His only safety lay in silence and concealment: none would be the loser but Martin; and surely his share in the indigo plantation might suffice for him. He could not do better than return to Jamaica, and settle there.

Feeling somehow as if Martin's interest, and that of truth and justice, depended on Mr. Proctor's recovery, Mr. Thorpe grew restless and uneasy. He walked across country, over hill and dale, to Settle, with the sad news, and Jasper's letter of apology for non-appearance at Ivy Fold; and then back again, with letters and messages both

from Edith and Dora. Next, finding the patient progressing favourably, he betook himself to Leeds, to make one at a meeting of delegates from different Yorkshire Mechanics' Institutions. Here he was in his element. Like John Wilson, he was all alert to do good, and in this meeting, which eventuated in the union of such institutions for the mutual interchange of lectures, books, reports, and other matters through the medium of the central head in Leeds, where a peripatetic library was to be founded, he took more than a casual interest. This Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, with Edward Baines at its head, brought him so prominently forward, introduced him to so many fresh acquaintances, and renewed so many old associations, that he forgot the flight of time, and remained in Leeds after all the delegates had dispersed, John Wilson, staunch to his favourite motto, being gone with them.

When he did go back, on the 21st, it was in most depressing weather. Floods were general throughout Yorkshire, and some

portions of Leeds were three feet deep in water. By that time his public excitement had somewhat faded under the influence of bad news concerning Allan and his wife, who were said by Mrs. Sheepshank not to be flourishing as she could wish, or rather so flourishing that Allan's money threatened to come quickly to an end, unless, which she much doubted, he was making a fortune by sharebroking. She said that Grace was jealous of Buttermere's influence, and much troubled at the continued isolation from her parents, having been passed in the street with a stony stare by Mr. Metcalfe, who grew grander and loftier every day.

It was, therefore, not in the best of spirits Mr. Thorpe hung up his dripping beaver and top-coat on the oxen horns in Lawyer Proctor's passage and went upstairs to find assembled round the bright fire, not only Mr. Proctor himself in dressing-gown and easy-chair, but Martin, Jasper (whose birthday it chanced to be), and Simon Postlethwaite, all deep in discussion of the robbery, the nature of which had transpired, and was

speedily explained to the new-comer by Martin, who carried Mr. Thorpe off to the privacy of his own room for the purpose.

"I thought something disastrous was in the wind," exclaimed the latter, "I never took a journey in worse spirits in my life. Not even when I turned my back on Osmanthorpe. It was a false step was that; I feel it now. Had I been in possession I could have turned the estate over to the rightful owner without a word, and in good condition. I do not wonder at Mr. Proctor's dismay. For more than twenty years he has calculated on turning out the usurpers from his schoolmate's seat. It is a blow to both of us. For my part I feel that my father's wicked deed dishonours me."

"Nay, nay, my good sir," cried Martin, "that can never be. No son is answerable for his sire's misdeeds. Nor is my good guardian to be held responsible for this mischance."

"Whya—no," asserted Mr. Thorpe in bewilderment. "But how did it happen? Who is suspected?"

"It is all perplexity," replied Martin. "It appears that, shortly after we left the house on the Saturday, an overdriven beast rushed from the market into the passage, followed by drovers and whooping lads. Postlethwaite, opening his office door to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, fancied he heard a noise in his master's office, though, between the fog and the crowd, he could not discover whether anyone passed in or out. Almost immediately Mr. Ellis appeared at his own door, at the other end of the passage, and, taking the beast by the horns, literally backed it out into the street again. No sooner was the coast clear than Postlethwaite crossed the hall, found Mr. Proctor's office door ajar, and his keys hanging from the lock of his desk. He says he locked the desk without looking within, took charge of the keys, and they never passed out of his custody until he handed them to his master on our return. It is therefore conjectured that either the beast was driven in to cover the entrance of some one who had observed our departure, or

that some common thief had stolen in under cover of the confusion, and carried off the box in the supposition that it contained money or other valuables. And now, Mr. Thorpe, let us return to the other room, and pray treat the matter lightly. The loss is, I understand, not irreparable, and I should not like to grieve the good old man who has been like a father to me."

"I suppose Martin has acquainted you with the result of my carelessness," said Mr. Proctor, on their entrance, rubbing his hands one over the other with a slow, dreamy, melancholy movement.

"Whya, yes," responded Mr. Thorpe, meditatively; "and the question is now, what is to be done?"

"I should advertise freely for the stolen box, and offer a reward without giving a clue to the contents," suggested Martin.

"Advertising costs so much," objected Jasper, "and so few of the lower orders can read. I should send the bellman round next market day, and then you can offer a reward."

"If I might be allowed to speak," put in Postlethwaite, quietly, "I should do both, cost is nothing where great interests are at stake;" then, in an aside to Jasper, "I think the premises should be well searched in case the box should have been removed for better security, and forgotten."

Was it only Jasper's conscience that took alarm at the clerk's tone, or was there any hidden meaning in it, that Jasper should retort so pointedly, "Perhaps Mr. Postlethwaite would not object to have his own office and house searched, since he was the only person in possession of the keys."

The tone, professedly low, was yet audible to all. Mr. Proctor was alarmingly disturbed, and called Jasper to order, reminding him how old and faithful a servant Postlethwaite had been; and, though the clerk insisted on the hint being acted on, his master would not hear of it.

"You have been craving to visit Jamaica, Martin," said his guardian after a while. "You had perhaps better prepare to set sail as soon as the expected mail has brought

Mr. Vasey's despatches, and obtain the duplicate papers from his hands; and you had better bring the picture you mentioned, and your nurse, if alive. But this is all in case the box is not restored beforehand;" and the old man sank back in his chair exhausted, as he added: "You are not left without means, Martin; and, if you were, I would spend my last shilling to see you righted."

What was there to hinder Jasper's restoration of the box and its contents in answer to the bellman or the advertisements? He surely might have managed it without exciting suspicion. Ah! but he could not have claimed the reward without discovery, and no common thief would forego *that.* And the declaration of his grandfather that he would "spend his last shilling on Martin," would have put a stopper on his conscience, had he not been desirous to have the ocean between Martin and Edith. And conscience, like the fabled bottle-imp, proving uncomfortably alive, however closely stoppered down, he endeavoured to stifle it with argu-

ments to prove that no real injury was done by withholding the deeds, so long as duplicates were obtainable. At the most delay was all that could be complained of, and, if the lawyers went in for "mesne profits," even delay would be no real loss. As for the voyage to Jamaica, Martin had always contemplated that. The only harm done had been to his grandfather, and men of his age were liable to such attacks; and what was done could not be undone.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY.

NO despatches of any kind from Mr. Vasey. The West Indian mails were due and overdue; and, as the year 1837 wept itself out, and January followed sternly to bind up the rivers of England with frosty fetters, it began to be feared that the good ship which bore them had gone to pieces in that same terrific tempest which had deluged Yorkshire so disastrously on and about St. Thomas's day. And time, which drifted figure-head and floating spars ashore on the Welsh coast, only confirmed suspicion that the *Albatross* would skim the wave no more.

Martin, who had all along expressed his desire to revisit Jamaica, before the final

emancipation of the slaves, was impatient to be gone. But Mr. Proctor, less brisk and buoyant than of yore, seemed unaccountably loth to let him depart.

Squire Thorpe was prickly as a hedgehog; determined not to surrender the estate save on compulsion, he threatened to turn the waters of the mere into the colliery, and so swamp the workings. Then, and not till then, did Josiah Proctor consent to Martin's taking of a berth in a steam-vessel announced to sail for Kingston on the 2nd of July, when it would carry with it the news of Queen Victoria's coronation.

And scarcely then would Archibald Thorpe consent to part with his newly-acknowledged relative. He insisted on Martin giving him at least a week at Ivy Fold, and among the hills, before they started.

"You must come and say good-bye to the old places and old people," he said; "there is no knowing what changes may take place before you come back."

"I'm afraid there will be one change I

shall not care to see," thought Martin, but, though he put in a demurrer against intruding on Miss Earnshaw, his father's favourite cousin Archibald carried the day.

It was brilliant weather for Craven, not a cloud to be seen, and much of the time was spent in geological and botanising rambles, or Martin would have carried few memories of pleasure away with him.

The affectionate warmth of his host, the friendliness of dimpled Dora, now in her teens, who played her harp and sang for him as Edith once had done, scrupling not to ask for a load of rarities from his tropic home; the hearty good will of Janet, the grateful recognition of Tippie, who rubbed his head against his trousers, and mounted to his knee with purring satisfaction as of old, were all insufficient to overpower the torturing pain of constrained courtesy on the part of Edith. No item was omitted in the way of hospitality and comfort, and now and then the old Edith gleamed on her cheeks and in her eyes, but only for an

instant, she was again reserved and indifferent.

He was glad to escape with Mr. Thorpe to the healthful and consoling haunts of nature, where he could shake off the morbid fancies and longings which overpowered him in her presence. He had no mind to make a fool of himself a second time, and lay his heart open to scorn and rejection, and something within him whispered that his only safety was in flight.

Of the struggle in the young man's breast Archibald Thorpe happily knew nothing. Well pleased he carried him off in the early morning, only to return late at night well laden ; Keeper, their four-footed companion, more weary than themselves. Once more did Martin ramble through varied Ribblesdale, look upwards at the stupendous amphitheatre of Malham Cove, take an oar on Malham Tarn, shudder under the overhanging rock at Gordale, and watch the rushing torrent leap and turn and leap again with threatening violence in every fall.

Once again did he traverse the familiar scars of Giggleswick, mount to the top of lofty Ingleborough,—the Hill of Fire,—and hold discourse with his friend on the survival of Baal-worship in the annual beacons kindled on its flattened top; or, descending into the wild and gloomy valley between the bleak and rugged steeps of Ingleborough and Whernside, seek the subterraneous home of the Greta, and linger among the terrific chasms and marvels of Weathercote Cave.

They dug up plants, picked up quartz crystals, or chipped out fossils as they went, but it was not until the last day of Martin's visit that anything memorable occurred.

It was the day that half the country—the urban half, at least—was alive with processions and rejoicings, for a young queen was being crowned—that these two dissimilar lovers of nature turned from crowds into deepest and wildest solitudes, and held reverential converse on the secrets of the rocks. They had wound among the stony folds of Attermire, and, turning at an angle, took their lonely way like mites over

the green turf beneath the rugged scars of Langcliffe, where the limestone, hoar with age, was mottled, so to speak, with patches of emerald verdure, rivalling the boulder-bestrewn pastures beneath.

Keeper, as usual, ran hither and thither, now before, now behind, breaking into the conversation with a desultory bark by way of chorus. Suddenly, from a solitary clump of trees some distance from the scar, darted a tawny animal, and, crossing their path a few paces ahead with the celerity of fear, made direct for the cliff, bounded wildly up the ascent, and disappeared among a luxuriant growth of nettles.

"A hare! a hare!" cried Martin.

"Nay, lad, it's a fox, and Keeper's after it! That's Will Hartley's *lion* for a sovereign! The hunters lost it somewhere hereabouts. But where's Keeper? Keeper! Keeper!" called Mr. Thorpe, resuming, to Martin, "You've heard of the lion John Danson and Will Hartley saw in Staircase Cave, have you not?" and he began to tell the anecdote, with sundry interruptions in

the way of calls and whistles for Keeper; and then, there being no signs of the dog, proceeded to ascend the irregular scar over a sloping bank, where stones gave way at every other step, and tearing away, with resolute hand, a screen of nettles, disclosed a hole, through which both fox and dog must have vanished.

Almost on the instant Keeper emerged from a similar group of nettles a few yards away, and came up shaking his rough brown sides and his bushy tail.

"I should think there was a cave of some kind there, Mr. Thorpe," suggested Martin.

"Whya, yes, my lad, and I mean to have a peep what it's like. If there's an inlet and an outlet, the air must circulate, and there will be no mephitic vapours. So here goes, though the hole *is* somewhat of the smallest."

"You had better let me make the first attempt, sir. You are wider in the shoulders than I. But, first, it may be advisable to remove a few of the loose stones at the bottom."

This was done, and Martin crept in on hands and knees for a considerable distance, until the narrow passage seemed to expand into wide chambers, the extent of which he could not realise in the imperfect light—a gloom but one remove from dark.

All at once his name echoed and reverberated through the hollow cavern. The light was blocked in the long tunnel by which he had entered, and he could not find the passage save by groping against the sides, where he struck his hands against what experience told were stalactites and crystals.

When the passage was found, to his horror he discovered that he was a prisoner, and not he only. Mr. Thorpe's scientific zeal had overcome discretion, and his broad angular shoulders had stuck fast where his younger and more symmetrical companion had slipped through.

It was an appalling discovery. Beaded drops stood on the clammy brows of both. Death in its most horrid form seemed at hand to clutch them. True, Keeper had

found another outlet, but what of that? Martin could not leave Mr. Thorpe to perish, even if the other aperture were found, and wide enough for him to pass.

In this direful extremity he remembered the new friction-matches he carried to light his cigars, and by their aid made himself and Mr. Thorpe acquainted with their exact position and mutual peril.

Then Martin laid his hands upon the imprisoned shoulders, and strove to force them back. In vain. They were wedged fast, as in a vice. They were both brave and fearless men, accustomed to face danger, and not easily daunted. Each strove to hide the fears in his own breast, and discuss their chances calmly. Mr. Thorpe would have had Martin seek the other outlet, and leave him to his fate, if relief were not at hand.

"Nay," said Martin. "That cannot be; your body blocks the air passage; you would die of suffocation before I could bring help from Langcliffe. Let me see," and he struck a match. "The ground beneath us

is soft and crumbly. I might cast the loose stones behind; but that would prevent retreat, and not release your shoulders!"

And now Martin's geology served student and teacher in good stead, for it had caused him to carry a hammer, and instructed him how to split the limestone best.

But it did not provide a current of fresh air, or find him eyes to see in the dark. Archibald's shoulders received many a blow intended for the rock; and they were both faint and well-nigh stifled before chip by chip the gap was widened sufficiently to release the square frame and enable the owner of the cramped limbs to crawl backwards into the daylight, thankful for deliverance—and for the *discovery*, though it had cost a torn coat, some sore bruises, and placed two lives in imminent peril.

Daylight lingers long in June, but twilight was creeping down the valley, and the air was laden with evening's condensed aroma of roses and new-mown hay, when Keeper announced two late arrivals in most disreputable and inappropriate costume at Ivy

Fold; where a party, called together in honour of Martin, had been compelled to drink their tea and keep conversation alive without either their host or his chief guest.

Slighted dignity was rapidly giving place to apprehension, in spite of Edith's assurance that Mr. Thorpe commonly forgot the flight of time when away on such expeditions; and there were whispers of leave-taking.

Their coming changed all. What a flutter there was of silks and muslins! What an uprising of broadcloth! What ejaculations and clasping of hands, as the besmeared and hungry adventurers tendered their apologies, and of course narrated their perilous discovery of a *new cave!*

What an excitement it caused! There was Dr. Burrow, and the Rev. John Howson, and plain John Tatham, all eager geologists, on the *qui vive* for information. There was Lawyer Hartley—spectacles on forehead—shaking hands with Martin, calling on his quiet niece, Mrs. John Hartley, and Miss Cragg to remember his first

prognostications anent the youth, and to honour the bravery and magnanimity and the presence of mind he had shown on this occasion; and there was also Mr. Thorpe, clenching what Martin disclaimed. Dora, be sure, was the most excited of all; she clung to her father, then to Martin, threw her white arms round Keeper's neck and hugged him, and finally rushed with her rare news to Janet in the kitchen.

After her first hurried questioning, Edith stood mute, her hands clasped together, her lips compressed, her eyes expanded, her cheeks pale and flushed by turns. What if those two had died in that dark cave? Died of hunger and exhaustion, and never been discovered? She shuddered as the thought struck her with an icy chill. Was not this the noble unselfish Martin in whom she had believed before—ah, yes, before *that*. And once more she wondered if he had been wronged.

But now in burst Janet, and the hungry men cried out for a wash and supper, and Edith's dreaming was put to flight.

There had been one visitor—only one—as Miss Vasey afterwards remarked, who, somewhat lukewarm in his congratulations, kept himself apart, and, lounging against the heavy book-case, seemed to listen with cool indifference, yet never moved his green grey eyes from Edith's face.

It was Jasper, there unexpectedly with a last message from his grandfather to Martin. He was not so indifferent as he appeared. His old jealousy of Martin was quickened into fresh and stinging life by Mr. Thorpe's exaltation of him into a hero; none the less that Edith's countenance and manner were perplexing. Was she simply grateful for her stepfather's preservation, or did some deeper feeling underlie her silent emotion? How thankful he should be when Pickersgill was fairly out of England! He should not be sorry if the ship went to the bottom with him in it!

It was not a very benevolent wish; but jealousy is not benevolent; and he certainly emphasised the wish as Martin took leave the next morning, when Edith, after a few

words of grateful thanks for his preservation of her stepfather, finally wished the traveller "a successful voyage," in tones which even Martin himself thought once more natural and kindly, and touched with something of sad pathos. And what though Jasper stood beside her, as if to assert possessive right, he would carry that last sweetly toned wish away with him as a talisman, as he carried a few withered rushes her fingers had bound together by the Ebb-and-Flow, six summers agone; summers which had been as winters to him.

It was not the only good wish that followed him. Janet, who had a wholesome dread of the sea, blubbered out hers behind her apron. Solomon Bracken, who dragged himself up the hill to see the coach start, spat on the crown-piece he found in his palsied hand, and, with many a blessing on the liberal donor, vowed he would keep the coin until he came back; as though life were in his keeping, too.

And stretching over the heads and shoulders of the gaping crowd the long,

bony arm of Thomas Clapham was extended to him for a parting grip, and he was told to "keep out of the mermaids' clutches; or he might discover a cave he could not chip his way out of."

Archibald Thorpe, unwilling to say "goodbye," accompanied his kinsman as far as Lancaster, and sent him on with prayers and blessings.

In Manchester he was met by John Danson, who, full of sympathy for his friend, asked point-blank, "Do you think Foxey had anything to do with the disappearance of your papers?"

The very suggestion gave upright Martin a shock. He scouted the idea, said he knew Ellis owed him no goodwill, but it was impossible he could so wrong and deceive his excellent grandfather, Mr. Proctor.

At that time it was only (!) an hour's journey from Liverpool to Manchester by train. John, like a faithful esquire, bore him company thither, with the chivalry of old schoolboy days, not quitting his knight-errant until the ship was getting up its

steam ; and, when they parted, not one whit better satisfied that "Foxey was not at the bottom of it all."

CHAPTER X.

DISASTER.

JASPER was now pretty much master of his own time, but, his opinion being that "time is money," he was not disposed to loiter where nothing was to be gained, and he found Edith so little disposed to yield to his pressing entreaties for an early marriage that he mounted Dapple and departed before the day or his temper had time to cool, as the quadruped discovered to his cost.

You see he vented on the poor animal the ill-humour and dissatisfaction he had not dared to display before Edith. His jealousy had suggested the possibility of her throwing him over for the wealthy West Indian,

who had Osmanthorpe in perspective, and was "the sort of hero to catch a foolish woman. As far as good looks are concerned, I think we are about equal," he argued with himself, complacently, as he walked down Bell Hill after the coach had gone, "but a poor lawyer, with his way to make in the world, and not three hundred pounds to make it with, is no match for the planter's plethoric purse. And now that he is exalted into a sort of demi-god for a mere common-sense instinct of self-preservation—" he paused, "well, I must carry my own cup evenly if I would bring the draught to my lips."

In judging Edith by his own standard he wronged her grievously, but his early training had disqualified him from considering it a wrong. If Edith had accepted him without a mercenary motive, be sure no such motive would influence her to change. Only the opening of her eyes could do that; and, unless the fillet he had bound across them slipped aside, her constancy might be relied on. She had accepted the deep

homage of his love as one who renders in return all she can, but still insufficient; and she ever felt herself a debtor to his heart, and proud to be the chosen of a man so fond, so universally esteemed.

And so it was with infinite pain she set aside his impassioned pleadings and urged the higher claims of a sacred trust and her duty.

"Oh, Jasper," she entreated, "you know Dora is still too young to be left."

"She is as old as you were."

"Ah, yes, but I had had a mother's careful training; had never been indulged; indeed, I had been too healthy to require it. Now poor, dear Dora has been delicate and fragile from her birth; her very faults may be traced to it. I am afraid we have spoiled her a good deal, but then what could we do other, with a poor, motherless bairn who cried herself ill whenever she was thwarted? And father and I have always hoped that her affections would correct her temper as she grew older and wiser."

"False philosophy, Edith, you should have whipped the wisdom into her when she was a lile bairn. I know Janet thought so! And, talking of Janet, surely she can manage the house, and, between her and Mr. Thorpe, Dora will be well enough cared for. Is my happiness nothing, that you sacrifice it to an imaginary duty?"

"It is not imaginary. A promise to the dead is sacred. And, Jasper, you are mistaken about Janet. The faithful creature in some way seems to cling in allegiance to me. But, when I marry and quit this house, Janet will marry and quit it also. Her sweetheart has waited more years than you. She and Tim were about to be married when mother died. So you see Dora would really be left alone if I went; and, Jasper dear, you would not have me less faithful to my trust than a servant woman?" and Edith's dark eyes looked up into Jasper's with the clear light of conscious truth in their depths.

"Then how long do you expect *me* to

wait before I can call you *my* Edith in reality? If I did not love you with my whole soul I might be more patient."

"We are both quite young enough," she answered, resting one hand upon his shoulder; "it will do us no harm to wait until Dora has turned sixteen."

"Whew, Edie!" he almost whistled, shaking off her hand to pace the floor in disgust, "*I* shall not wait Miss Dora's maturity."

"Then," replied Edith, with enforced calmness, "perhaps our engagement had better terminate at once. I *must* wait. There is no alternative."

He had overstepped his mark. In an instant he was by her side with an arm around her, protesting against her coldness and cruelty in suggesting such an issue, declaring that he could only resign her with his life, and that he could not give her up if she kept him waiting until his hair was grey.

Allowing for lover-like exaggeration, he meant it. But it did not improve his temper

to feel that such a declaration should have been wrung from him; and he made "business" a plea for an early exit. It, however, was not until he was mounted on the broad grey back of Dapple, and had left his good angel behind, that his other angel took possession of his ear, and whispered that his chance of fingering Edith's few thousands was farther off than he had anticipated. His irritation communicated itself to whip and spur, for he had meant to build a pyramid of wealth on that foundation. He should have to fall back on his own savings and try if he could not multiply them a little faster. If he were only living in Leeds or Bradford, he could find a hundred ways of turning over his money rapidly and quietly. In a wretched little place like Skipton every one knew his neighbour's business, and it was next to impossible. How he wished they had a case in hand which would take him to either town occasionally, and pay for time and expenses!

As if to gratify his desires, he was called to Leeds before another week went by.

The clouds hung thick and black over the town when Lawyer Proctor's letters were delivered by the postman on Wednesday, the fourth of July; and, as the lawyer opened a missive in Martin's well-known hand, posted in Liverpool by John Danson as an assurance that the writer had sailed, he involuntarily glanced upwards at the lowering clouds whence heavy drops were beginning to fall, and gave utterance to a hope that Martin Pickersgill was already beyond range of the storm, the hope being accompanied by an anathema against the thief who had made the voyage necessary. And as blue lightning flashed, and thunder rolled overhead, and rain mingled with hail came pelting down, ploughing the ill-paved street into mire, the restless old gentleman fidgeted about uneasily from one office to the other, repeating his hopes for Martin's safety, and his maledictions on the *thief*, until Jasper (who regarded his possession of the box as the result of an *unfortunate mischance*), in his heart of hearts once more

wished Pickersgill and his box of papers at the bottom of the sea.

The following afternoon a horseman, spattered from head to heel with mire, hot and reeking like his steed, drew rein at the lawyer's door, and, flinging himself from the saddle, hurried in with the intelligence that nearly all Osmanthorpe lay under water, swamping even the coal-mine; that the flood had reached an old entrance, low on the hillside, and poured in on the men, women, and children at work, before more than half had time to escape.

Josiah Proctor clasped his hands together.

"My God!" he cried, "I had a prescience some calamity impended, but I never dreamed of aught so appalling as this. Yet it is always so. The evil we anticipate does not come, or shapes itself into a blessing. It is the evil we do not expect that comes down on us with a crash. We must bestir ourselves, and let us thank God that Mr. Pickersgill had sailed before this fresh disaster came to overwhelm and daunt his brave spirit!"

In less than an hour and half, Mr. Proctor and Jasper were speeding on two stout nags, hired for the occasion, towards the scene of the disaster.

Deluge and devastation became more decided as they advanced. The roads were broken up and obstructed by stones, timber, and dead animals. Crops were beaten down, trees and bushes were uprooted, walls washed away, cottages unroofed and bared to the sky, windows shattered by the hail, which had cut and torn foliage where roots were firm and fast; foot-bridges were wrecked, barns and piggeries had been invaded, poultry had taken refuge on trees or housetops, clothes and furniture were cast adrift, and the very subsidence of the water showed what the ravage had been miles upon miles. At Osmanthorpe all was wailing and desolation; the village on the hill side had escaped little better than the hall, which stood on its raised terrace, looking down with shattered windows as from an island on a turbid lake, which had left its mark in green slime along the lower

courses of stone, and blotted out lawn and weedy walks and garden ground together.

At the colliery the inflowing water had put out fires. But the engine was again at work, throbbing like a human heart in its superhuman efforts to overcome the enemy, and give the anxious pitmen on the bank a chance to recover their dead.

Hour by hour went by, and another morning broke, and still the throbbing engine beat in echo to sobbing women and the groans of men; and the sun rose high and waned, and rose again, and yet the blackened waters held their own. A week or more was gone before one by one the bodies of wee children, and young girls, and strong-limbed men were brought to bank, nine in all, and yet the pit held more and refused to yield them up.

On the third or fourth day Archibald Thorpe, fresh from excavating and exploring the newly-discovered Victoria Cave, was amongst them, stimulating the weary colliers by his own example to descend and renew the search, bringing up two of the dead

little ones himself, whilst Jasper passed about distributing his grandfather's bounty with a grudging hand, and the lawyer, full of trouble for himself and the absent owner, lamented his inability to do more than offer *money* to comfort alike the sorrowing and the needy; the mother who mourned for her dead child, and the woman who had lost her washing-trough. Jasper thought "gold a sovereign heal-all." Josiah said, "Ah, Jasper, it's a sorry plaister for a sore heart."

But now many were the consultations round the engine-house with manager and viewer and engineer, for there began to be fears lest the water could not be mastered. The final abandonment of the pit was not improbable; and on one of these consultations Squire Thorpe intruded, chuckling over the "cold water thrown upon the jackanapes pretender to Osmanthorpe," and hoping he had a long purse to dip in the pit and bale the water out, as he was not likely to collect the rents on the estate, or to sell many tons of coal yet awhile. And

then there was a quarrel between the brothers, and, but that they were parted, blows would have followed words.

The last of the recovered dead were buried. The survivors were assisted. All that could be done now was to persevere in pumping, and to acquaint Mr. Proctor with the result from time to time.

Before they started homewards, Mr. Proctor, from the summit of the hill above the colliery, pointed out to Jasper the wide extent and range of Osmanthorpe, with its distant woods and outlying farms, desolate though it lay beneath the refuse of the flood.

"Think you not, Jasper," said he, "the legal business of that estate would be worth something? I had hoped to leave it in your hands, for Martin would never, surely, think of transferring it to a stranger; but you do not get on very cordially together, and I am sorry for it. Remember, I told you years ago to cultivate his friendship."

"I wish you had told me *why*," said Jasper. "I might have been more careful; but there seldom is much cordiality between two men

who love the same woman!" Yet he kept to himself the cry of his conscience, that he had evidently robbed himself of a lucrative appointment when he laid his inquisitive fingers on a box which did not belong to him.

They took Leeds on their way home, stopping at a commercial inn, and dining (per favour) at the commercial table. To Jasper's surprise the conversation, when it did not concern the viands before them, or the pretty barmaids and waiters at the inns along the roads, turned less on the state of trade than the revolution railways were likely to bring about, and were bringing about, in the commercial world; for the railway mania was spreading far and wide, and none were more alive to the fact than the men amongst whom he was thrown so casually, men who threw themselves into the discussion with warmth and animation as if it concerned them vitally, as it did. More than one speaker maintained that it was a matter seriously affecting the interests of commercial travellers, as it overthrew old

traditions, and was likely to affect their allowance for travelling expenses, and might throw many of their number off the road.

Presently the discourse drifted to railway speculation, and the fabulous fortunes made by speculators; and a traveller for a Coventry firm, who had just come from York, spoke to a friend in the Manchester trade across the table, and said; "I say, Heap, you remember George Hudson, the draper, of York, and the little shop he had in College Street, by the old archway?"

"Ay, sure; one could touch the ceiling with one's upstretched hand!" assented the other.

"Ah! And now he's Lord Mayor of York, and Chairman of the North Midland Railway, too grand to know a body. He gave me a blank stare when I nodded to him yesterday, as if he had never looked at a sample of ribbon in his life, or given a fellow an order over his own counter. I hear he gave a grand dinner last December at the Mansion House to more than a hundred

gentlemen. Railways have made a great man of *him*."

"Nay," said the other, called Heap, "I heard he had a thousand pounds left him as a legacy, and that set him agoing."

"Left to his wife, you mean. But that does not matter. 'What's my wife's is mine, and what's mine's my own,' you know. The man was always uncommonly sharp and shrewd; he made a venture in railway shares that turned up trumps; then he got mixed up with the directors of the North Midland, and was introduced to a Mr. Metcalfe, and now the pair are making money by steam, and George Hudson is my Lord Mayor and talks of going into Parliament. So much for railway speculations?"

The talk diverged right and left, and Jasper listened as he heard what scrip was at a premium, which at a discount, discussed with all the volubility, confidence, and (in) accuracy of the commercial room.

He was glad when Mr. Proctor retired on the plea of over-fatigue, and abandoned him to his own resources for the rest of the day.

In less than ten minutes he had left the reek of tobacco behind, and was on his way to Basinghall Street and the office of Buttermere and Earnshaw.

Ellison, the clerk, eyed him askance, but carried in his name to his principals, and ushered him into their joint office, as though he had never seen or heard of Jasper Ellis before.

Very friendly and chatty were both Buttermere and Earnshaw; family and friendly matters were alone discussed for some time; Allan shook hands with him afresh as his future brother-in-law; and then, after he had contrived, by a casual question or two, to elicit from Buttermere that Ellison could not possibly be the same individual he had known in his childhood, he opened out the real object of his visit and arranged for the investment of some £150 in railway scrip under their auspices.

It was by no means a large sum, but, eager as was his craving for gain, every coin that passed out of his own safe-keeping, for any purpose, was like a drop of the vital

fluid from his own heart; yet, had he not heard how fortunes had already been realised with less sums in railway shares, and were not the sharebrokers themselves primed with anecdotes to illustrate the seductive fact?

Buttermere and Allan appeared prosperous and jolly; had wine at hand, of which they were liberal; and, before they parted, the former intimated to Mr. Ellis, in the *strictest confidence*, that *they* had a railway scheme of their own in contemplation, which was likely to be a good thing for all concerned; that it was premature to say more at present, but *he* should be one of the very first admitted to their confidence.

He went back to Skipton "smittle," as the Craven people say, having taken the infection naturally and readily. A wink from the inoculator conveyed the intelligence to the green-eyed clerk, as the office door closed behind the new investor and the clerk's employer, Basil Buttermere, who, leaving his unbusinesslike partner behind, accompanied Jasper to the inn door, on the

pretence of "business in the neighbourhood."

If the "business" was a fiction, how was Jasper to know? If Basil Buttermere had plans, and schemes, and secrets unsuspected by his own partner, how was Jasper to suspect? And if the said oily Basil Buttermere had a far-seeing eye on Edith's thousands, or Mrs. Statham's tens of thousands, how was Jasper to suspect *that?* Allan Earnshaw did not.

CHAPTER XI.

BROUGHT TO AN ISSUE.

VERY discouraging were the reports from the manager and viewer at Osmanthorpe Colliery. The engine was kept at work pumping, but, so long as only the upper seams could be worked, the output of coal was scarcely sufficient to cover the cost. Josiah Proctor became unusually fidgety and anxious; old Mrs. Statham, who had an insurmountable horror of the sea, keeping his uneasiness alive with her frequent inquiries for "news of that well-behaved young gentleman, Mr. Pickersgill."

When in due time a letter did arrive, it contained a hasty assurance of Martin's safe arrival at Kingston, whence it was dated,

and regret that he had not reached the island in time to participate in the rejoicing of the negroes on the 1st of August, when their emancipation became a complete fact. He promised to write more fully from Spanish Town. For that promised communication both Mr. Proctor and Mr. Thorpe waited, at first with eager expectation, then with growing anxiety. Anxiety gave place to fear, and then came—Martin himself, in deep mourning.

He was the bearer of disastrous tidings.

"From what I could gather," said he, "from the present owner of our old plantation, Mr. Vasey had *sold* the estate, in utter disgust at the prospect of cultivating crops with hired labour, intending to settle ultimately in New Orleans as a cotton-planter. He had stated openly that his young partner —meaning myself—had squeamish notions about slavery, and he thought he should visit Old England once again, if only to ascertain whether the cotton-planting must be on his own account, or for both. And I ascertained, before I came away, that Mr.

Vasey himself sailed in the ill-fated *Albatross*, and, to the best of belief, had on board with him, either in specie or securities, the whole of our possessions."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Proctor, uplifting his hands in dismay.

"Yes, everything—the purchase money of the estate, and the Government indemnity for the freedom of our slaves. And, when the *Albatross* went down, I lost not only my father's slave-bought fortune, but my father's friend and—mine."

Martin's voice faltered and his eye suffused as he concluded, but Mr. Proctor, who had listened in a sort of blank stupor, started to his feet, crying out,

"*All*, papers and all! Was the man mad to entrust all to one set of planks and cordage? There must be some mistake. He could never be so crazy. Money, papers, *all!*"

"Yes, papers and all!" answered Martin, sadly (for in his inmost heart he had cherished a hope of owning and restoring the home of his ancestors, since he had

known it as such). "But you must remember, Mr. Vasey also entrusted his life in the ship."

"His life was his own, to risk if he chose, his property was his own; but he had no right to dispose of your share in the plantation without my consent during your minority, or yours afterwards. And to risk all in one vessel was sheer lunacy," exclaimed the old gentleman, in angry distress. "It is ruin, absolute ruin! Osmanthorpe is clean gone *now!*"

"Perhaps not, sir; I have with me certificates of my birth, my parents' marriage and death, and I found the picture of Pickersgill Hope hanging on the wall of my old nurse Dinah's cabin. The old woman herself I have left with a friend in Manchester, to rest after the long voyage."

"You might just as well have left her behind, lad; certificates and picture are but waste paper without the will. And it seems Mr. Thorpe now cannot lay *his* hands on the title-deeds. That bustling woman Janet cleaned up his study some years back, and

he has never been able to find anything she meddled with since. He intends to have a fresh search. But what's the use without the will or the sinews of war? I have almost exhausted our available funds in efforts to drain the coal-pit, which was, unfortunately, 'drowned out' only two days after you sailed. It is just ruin, ruin!"

"Drowned out! Were any lives lost?" questioned Martin. The reply seemed to affect him more than any loss of property. That human lives—the lives of women and little children—should have been sacrificed for his gain, was, he said, more to be deplored than the loss of fortune. That might be replaced.

"How so?"

"Well, I called on my friend John Danson—he is in his father's office—as I passed through Manchester, and there chanced to be with him at the time a railway engineer or contractor, named Armistead, complaining of the difficulty to find a competent surveyor for a north-country line, the competition for really good surveyors was so

great. Without preface, John pointed to me, saying, 'Here would be the very individual for you, Mr. Armistead, if he were not a man of fortune,' and then there was some lively chat on the subject. We became very friendly, for almost at the first sound of my voice Mr. Armistead looked me full in the face and asked me if I remembered resigning my seat on the Lancaster and Skipton coach to a traveller who had himself resigned his inside place to a Mr. Allan Earnshaw, with a Miss Metcalfe in his charge. It was at Giggleswick one Christmas.—He had little need to remind me of time or place. I had reasons of my own for remembering—" And something like a sigh followed the parenthesis. "But the mention of names so familiar, not only to myself but John, led to conversation, and, finally, we three spent the evening together at the Star Hotel. And now that it turns out I am a poor man after all, I think the sooner I write and close with the offer Mr. Armistead made—half in jest and half in earnest—the better. If that vacancy be

filled another may occur, and I do not mean to waste time or energies in bewailing the inevitable. Who knows—my habits are not expensive—I may pick up by the way sufficient to set the colliery right and keep it in hand? And"—Martin put his hands on his guardian's shoulders, and looked him steadfastly in the face through his eloquent eyes,—"believe me, Mr. Proctor, if there be one thing more necessary to me than another, at this time, it is work, real, downright, hard work, that shall leave me no time to brood over troubles or disappointments."

And so it came to pass that Martin Pickersgill, having lost all that he had, and all that he had hoped to have, and *not* having lost sight of Mr. Proctor's sometime hint with respect to surveying, albeit he had entered on the new study with a very different motive, turned his geological and mathematical training to account, and went forth to earn his own living in the sweat of his brow, proving, as John Danson had predicted, a valuable coadjutor to Mr.

Armistead, who did not seem to suffer much from his disappointment in love, or, if he did, worked it off as Martin was disposed to do. And whether either had an inkling of the other's case or not, one thing is certain, the two became fast friends.

I will not say that Jasper was glad of Martin's misfortunes, but he certainly was not sorry. He knew that Mr. Thorpe and his grandfather turned over the certificates Martin had brought, and scanned the sketch of Pickersgill Hope, laying their heads together to restore the rightful heir, and, though he knew nothing of the missing title-deeds, he was only too well aware that they lacked the old sea-captain's affidavit and the father's will, and that, so long as the sandal-wood box held them safe under the floor of his bed-room, there was little chance of ousting the present owner. This hiding-place happened to be also the private receptacle for Mr. Jasper's spare cash, of which, seeing that he never paid for aught that could be had for nothing, never lent except on good interest, never encouraged

beggars, and avoided church on collection Sundays, he must have had a pretty fair quota.

Of his miserly habits, his avaricious tendencies, Edith knew nothing; that he was careful she did know; his small economies had been so often placed to his credit as contrasted with the spendthrift habits of others, and she saw so much of Mr. Thorpe's thoughtlessness in money matters—which often caused her serious embarrassment—that she, like Miss Cragg, set Jasper's carefulness down as prudence, and a virtue. Then did not his blunt candour in speaking of Dora prove him frank and straightforward? his unwillingness to accuse Martin in that old matter of the ghost, was not that generous and noble? and his love for herself—his patient love—was it not something of which a woman might be proud?

And she was proud of him, looking forward to his visits and back upon them as oases in her existence; excusing their infrequency on the ground, as he did, of distance, and his grandfather's growing infirmities,

which threw the weight of business much on his shoulders; for there is no question that the intervals between his appearance at Ivy Fold were longer than they had been wont to be; so, stifling any doubt she might have, she turned to her household duties, to her superintendence of Dora, when the young lady had been removed from school, endeavouring to qualify her to bear rule over her father's house when she herself should leave it as Jasper's wife, and she busied herself with knitting-pins and sewing-needles, in the gradual preparation of an ample outfit for herself, her equally busy and now remunerative pen providing material for the growing store laid by in lavender against that happy time when she would be able to repay Jasper with the devotion of a life for his patient constancy.

Though she hardly recognised the fact, Dora's exacting caprices, and Mr. Thorpe's unthinking hospitality, tried her strength and patience exceedingly. But he, since the discovery of the cave in Langcliffe Scar, had been so engrossed with excavations and

explorations that he was rarely at home, and Dora paid long and frequent visits to her Aunt Statham, and in those intervals Edith regained her spirits and elasticity. She had ceased to find solitude burdensome, and was no longer "alone when alone." There were occasions when hand and brain grew weary from overwork, but at such times she brought down her aunt's old book of ballads, and sang them, with no audience save Janet and Tippie (who sat at one end of the piano when she played), and now and then a stray cow in the pasture, which came to the window to listen.

On one of these occasions, when she was warbling "Mary's Dream" with unusual pathos, Dora and her Aunt Statham came upon her without warning. It was her aunt's first appearance at Ivy Fold since she and Dora had been ignominiously dismissed from Skipton on account of that very song. And now there was a repetition of the painful scene so well remembered. Dora's scream was the first intimation of their presence to Edith—her

back being to the door. Janet was quickly on the spot; the old lady was laid on the sofa, and restored with vinegar and burnt feathers, and then, the fit over, not one minute longer would she remain under that roof, not one word more would she say to Edith, but, taking Dora by the arm, with her queer bag-bonnet all crushed and awry, she was toiling up Bell Hill to the "White Hart," where her chaise had been left, and in another hour was on her way to Skipton, her first attempt at conciliation having ended in deepened displeasure.

At the same time it must be told these frequent visits of Dora to her aunt were not altogether sources of satisfaction to Edith. Mrs. Statham was herself so capricious, and indulged or rebuked the girl so irrationally, that the slightest opposition at home was certain to provoke either a flood of hysterical tears or petulant threats to go back to her aunt. Sometimes, after those vagaries, she would throw her symmetrical arms around Edith's neck and entreat forgiveness, vowing that Edith was a saint to bear

her ill-humours, but it generally happened that she contrived to carry her threat into execution. Once she rushed out of the house, up the village, through Settle, and was met and brought back by Dr. Burrow, when three or four miles on her way to Skipton. After that, when offended, and she insisted on going to her aunt, Mr. Thorpe would reluctantly quit his study to take her thither by coach; or Edith would request Jasper to be her protector going or returning if these freaks occurred during his periodic visits, as, somehow, they very strangely appeared to do.

She was far too lovely and impulsive to be allowed to travel alone; and was sure of a welcome from Mrs. Statham, whose head and hands were tremulous with delight at these tokens of the darling's affection, and even Poll began to cry, "Back again, Dora! Couldn't live away from old aunt!"

The old aunt discovered her mistake before long, as Deborah and Janet both prognosticated she would.

"The fair one with golden locks," as Aunt

Statham called the light fragile girl, had passed her sixteenth birthday, and, Jasper having made no secret of Edith's absurd objection to marry before that chit Dora was sixteen, it followed that outsiders began to evince a new interest in the denizens of Ivy Fold, and to pester Janet or Mr. Thorpe, or even Edith herself, with the question, "When's the wedding to be?"

The question was easier asked than answered, for, singularly enough, Jasper, who had been all eagerness hitherto, ceased to press his betrothed for the fulfilment of her promise. Not that he loved her one tittle the less, but that there was a strife within his breast unknown to mortal save himself. A feverish restlessness took possession of him, destroyed his sleep and his appetite, and, when Edith expressed alarm lest illness was impending, he met her solicitude with snappish impatience that brought tears to her eyes, and the next moment he was all contrition and tenderness. Not Dora was more incomprehensible, and yet *she* was sufficiently trying.

Old Mr. Proctor, however, brought matters to an issue. He demanded of Jasper point-blank, in the presence of Mr. Thorpe, "Is it you, sir, who are shillyshallying, or is it Miss Edith? I insist on your bringing a wife home and settling down respectably, instead of jerking like a puppet between Skipton and Settle. I don't like it, sir, and old Dapple does not like it either."

And as it turned out that Mr. Thorpe considered that Edith had sacrificed herself to his own irregular habits, and to Dora's petty fancies, longer than should have been expected, he and Mr. Proctor arranged that the wedding should take place the first week in October—September having just put in an appearance—always pre-supposing Miss Edith's willingness.

To Edith a promise was a sacred thing: there was no drawing back, had she so desired. But, indeed, she had no such desire. She rested her blushing cheek against the beating heart of Jasper in perfect content. She would not have owned it even to herself, but she had been a bond-

slave to that promise made long years ago, and now the bond would lapse, and she could go free unto another and a closer bondage.

"And you will love me ever, Jasper, *ever* dearly as you love me now," she murmured, knowing well what the reply would be.

"Ever, Edie, ever! Whatsoever comes or goes I shall love you to the last hour of my existence." And his lips, burning as with internal fever, set a solemn seal upon her forehead and the delusive vow.

The rain-clouds of the day had gone, and the stars were out, when Edith sought the privacy of the white chamber, and knelt by that bed-side so long unused, and now only occupied by herself, as a recent concession to a whim of Miss Dora, who thought a young lady approaching seventeen "had a right to have a room to herself." The concession had cost Edith more than others suspected. Years had not weakened the impression of the last uses of that white bed, and for many nights she lay hours awake, feeling as if the cold and rigid

corpse of her dear, dead mother lay stretched beside her. She knew it was all imagination, and overcame it in time by sheer strength of will, but the effort was a trial. Yet now she lay there, even in more tranquillity than elsewhere; had a visible angel hovered over her beneath its snowy canopy, she could not have felt more assured that her mother's angelic presence brought repose.

And so she knelt there the night her wedding-day had been fixed, and prayed earnestly for a blessing and an assurance that she was not deserting her trust too soon.

She rose to her feet with a deep sense of calm, and a longing to kiss Dora and bid her a second good night before she slept. Not to disturb others, she crossed the landing quietly to her old room. As she entered, Dora, standing by the table, gave a start, and so did she. The window, which came low, almost to the floor, had apparently been left partially open on account of the heat, and the blind had not been drawn down.

"Why, Dora! That was a man's face against the window!"

"Oh, dear, yes. It has given me such a fright!" cried Dora. "I was taken by surprise!"

"I should think so. He surely could not be a robber. Suppose I call father and Jasper."

"Robber? Oh, no. I fancy it must have been one of Wildman's herdsmen, attracted by the light," said Dora, still in a tremble. "He must have mounted the iron guard at the window below to frighten us. I ought to have had the blind down."

"I cannot tell what should bring herdsmen or anyone else into the pasture at this hour, unless there was a sick beast to be tended," replied Edith, as she closed the window and lowered the blind, not very well satisfied. "Do not tremble, Dora dear. I'll not leave you again to-night; but lie down in my clothes and keep my ears on the alert; so that, if there be thieves, I can give the alarm."

She might have spared ears and nerves

the strain. Whosoever owned the face, Edith had no second alarm, although she kept awake.

At the breakfast-table in the morning she mentioned the man's face and their dread of thieves. Mr. Thorpe insisted it was all fancy. Edith was as certain that it was fact.

Janet, listening with her eyes and mouth as open as her ears, thought she saw a swift glance of intelligence shot across the table from Mr. Ellis to the young miss trifling with her tea-spoon. Without a word she went out at the back door, crossed to the kitchen garden, and was over the low wall and in the pasture in no time. She came back triumphant.

"Eigh, bud sumboddy's bin theer suer ez watter's weet! I's bin back o' beyond an' theer's t' clarty marks on's feet on t' railin' round maister's study winder, whosumdiver it ma' be."

She had never intruded into the study since the day she had done so much damage there with brush and duster; but Mr. Thorpe soon

satisfied himself by personal inspection, and, scouting the idea of thieves, came back with a notion of his own.

"Why, yes, there *is* mud and grass on the rail. Some one *has* been there, certainly; and I'd not be surprised if it turned out to be Thomas Clapham. It's just like one of his tricks. I heard he gave little Miss Vasey a great fright one night, climbing up the pear-tree and putting his head in at her window. That was more than two years ago, soon after Parson Clapham died."

"I daresay you're right," assented Jasper, conclusively.

"Neay, it wur noan Monkey Tommy, I's sure," thought Janet, but she kept her own counsel, and resolved also to keep a sharp look-out on Miss Dora.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEDDING DAY.

A BUSY month was September, 1841, both at Ivy Fold and Lawyer Proctor's; and at each place preparations were no little impeded by the unaccountable conduct of a silly girl.

It would be hard to say whether Dora or Kitty was the more perverse or incomprehensible at this time.

Janet and Edith, on housewifely and hospitable cares intent, were busy as bees. Martha Dyson's needle was set flying through silk and muslin, lace and ribbons, but Miss Dora would only lend a helping hands by fits and starts. One hour she was all mirth and laughter, the next, "like

Niobe, all tears." She would clasp her sister in a sudden embrace, and cry out that "she wished they had never seen Jasper! He was coming to part them! She wished there was no marrying!" or else that Edith was "cruel and selfish to think of leaving her;" and then, when she saw the look of pain on Edith's face, she would kiss her passionately, rush to her own room and bolt herself in.

She was to be her sister's bridesmaid, but the measuring and making of her simple white dress gave Martha Dyson more trouble than all Edith's put together. As Martha afterwards remarked, "I thought she would have torn the muslin to rags."

Yet she ran all their errands to Settle with alacrity and pleasure, coming back sometimes with dancing feet and sparkling eyes, at others fretful and cross, and she hung about her father's neck as if she were a very child to be fondled and petted.

In Skipton, Kitty absolutely turned stubborn, and refused her assistance in preparing for a "new mistress," vowing that she

would quit at the next hirings. Mrs. Ripley was in despair; Jasper himself remonstrated; Kitty burst into tears, and went about the house with a sullen frown upon her face. And so, going about the work with no good will, she contrived to do almost as much damage as service. Glass and china seemed to shatter at her touch, one of the nodding Chinese mandarins lost his head altogether, and in clearing out Jasper's room for renovation the antiquated looking-glass on his table was demolished by a ruthless curtain-rod; whereupon Kitty ran downstairs shrieking over the ill omen; and a sort of shuddering thrill went through the household, although Josiah Proctor did affect to treat the matter lightly—as a sign that "a newer and better reflector was required for the fair face of a young bride." But at the same time Mrs. Ripley was charged to keep Kitty in the regions of the kitchen, beyond the range of chimney ornaments and mirrors.

A sea-captain, deserted by his crew, was

never in worse plight than Mrs. Ripley after that edict. Puffing about in vain endeavours to be active, she lamented her sad case to Mr. Postlethwaite.

"Oh, Mr. Postlethwaite, it's an awful thing to be fat in one's old age! floors are already scrubbed and furniture rubbed, but how them new curtains are to get up, or them new carpets get put down, I no more know than the man in the moon."

To her amazement, the grave clerk came to the rescue and tendered his services (after office hours), and answered for those of Deborah Gill also.

That Simon Postlethwaite should condescend so far struck the good housekeeper dumb; but on the eve before the wedding-day, when he called Mrs. Ripley into Mr. Ellis's room to witness the transformation created by new chintz, new carpets, and the new pillared swing-glass, tastily draped by Deborah with muslin, she told him a good upholsterer had been spoiled in making him a lawyer.

"May be so, Mrs. Ripley," he assented,

calmly; but there was an incomprehensible something in his eyes and those of Deborah Gill, which might have told of a transformation effected that had more to do with law than with upholstery.

Tuesday was appointed for the wedding. Mrs. Statham had so far relented as to send a large bride-cake, and lace and satin for the bride's dress. Mr. Thorpe's invitations had gone far and wide, including even Allan and his wife.

Invited by Miss Cragg, Jasper had taken up his quarters at Well Bank in advance of the eventful day; partly, as he stated, that he might "hear the banns read out for the third time on the Sunday."

On that morning the bells were ringing for church. Mr. Thorpe was already chatting to friends in the church porch.

Edith, drawing on her gloves as she came downstairs, and singing "Rock of Ages" as she made the descent, was suddenly startled by the sound of hysterical sobbing in the parlour. Hastening forward to ascertain what fresh matter was troubling

Dora, her step and pulse were abruptly arrested.

She almost fell against the closed front door, as she leaned there for support, incapable of speech or motion. It was not merely Dora's hysterical cry, "I shall die! I shall die! It will kill me, Jasper," that had petrified her.

It was Jasper's reply (for he, too, was there in the recess behind the thin wooden partition, within half a yard of poor Edith).

"Hush, Dora, my sweet one; you are killing me. You know I cannot help myself. I am bound in honour to your sister, and cannot retract."

"You promised me, you—you know you did; and you said she cared more for Martin Pickersgill th—than for y—you. And oh, it will kill me! It will kill me! I cannot let you go," sobbed, almost shrieked Dora.

"Oh, Dora, Dora, what am I to do?"—and shuddering Edith heard false kisses fall on other lips than hers. "Before your rare loveliness developed and led my heart cap-

tive against my very will, I was bound to your good sister. The knowledge of your wealth of love did not come upon me to change my whole being until it was too late to free myself. For your sweet sake, Dora dear, I hung back. I would have freed myself, but my grandfather, your father, both held me to my bond, and there is now no retreat. We must be brave, and never let dear Edith know the sacrifice we make."

If he were playing a part (and his thin ears must have heard the hymn and footstep brought to a sudden stand so near), he played it effectively and cruelly. Edith heard of the sobbing reply only the opening words,

"I am sure if you were—to—speak to—Edie—she—would—" Clinging to the wall, shrinking from them and from herself, as if she, and not they, was guilty of a great premeditated wrong, Edith dragged herself upstairs again, burdened with a terrible load.

Her happiness was to be bought at the

sacrifice of two lives. She had kept Jasper waiting until she had lost him. Was she not more to blame than he? Had she not herself impressed him with Dora's loveableness? Had she not in time past rebuked him for censuring Dora? And, now that the man's eyes had been enchanted by the beauty of her young sister, what could she say?—"The fraud of men was ever so, since summer first was leafy." And yet! and yet! she had felt so assured of his love, had reposed so perfect a faith in his faith! What was to be done? Alone now, to all intents and purposes she felt herself. The motto on the mantelpiece before her seemed a mockery.

The bells dropped, the loiterers entered the church, the solemn psalms came floating in through the window from congregated throats, there was a hush as if for prayer, and still she lay blanched and bewildered across the white bed where she had flung herself in the abandonment of a stunned soul.

What wild inarticulate prayers went up to

the Throne of Grace for comfort and guidance in that hour of much agony!

She could not marry Jasper now that she knew he loved Dora better. She could not blight the life of the child she had vowed to guard from pain and sorrow. There remained for her nothing but to fold away her bridal dress and her bridal hopes with it. It was better that one should suffer than two. But the task of renunciation—how was that to be performed?

She was spared the supreme effort to which she was nerving herself.

Mr. Thorpe, coming in from church, annoyed that none of his family had been present, was surprised to discover Dora on the sofa drenched in tears, and Jasper on his knees beside her striving to console her. An explanation followed which Jasper managed so adroitly as to convey the impression that he was a man of strict honour, bewitched by Dora's infatuation for him; and to leave Mr. Thorpe perplexed between his parental love and his sense of justice.

Dora's tear-stained face carried the day. As it ever had been, so it ever would be, the fond father could see nothing more imperative than the gratification of his child.

Yet he was not now so blinded to truth and duty as to forget Edith and her claim to be considered. He sought her out, hardly daring to approach the momentous subject on which loves and lives seemed to depend.

To his astonishment, he found her composed, though pale; herself prepared to abjure her fickle lover, and to find excuses for both Dora and him.

"Let us be thankful," said she to her stepfather, "that we made this discovery before it was too late! Life-long misery must have followed such a revelation after marriage!" But what her feelings were as she said it, no one around her could imagine or realise. Her still, white, tearless face deceived them all.

Not even when Dora fell on her neck and kissed her with grateful warmth, crying out she was "the dearest and best of sisters," did

her countenance reveal the emotion within, for Edith could not with her whole heart say she was glad to make her happy.

Janet, on the first inkling of the broken-off match, had exclaimed, "Whya, yer's a pratty hingin-i-the-bell-ropes? No wedding!" But the woman did not say she was sorry. Jasper had never stood high in her estimation.

How all Settle and Giggleswick were taken by surprise when St. Alkald's bells rang out their wedding peal on the appointed morning; and the fair young Dora took her place at the altar beside the bridegroom, attired in the simple dress which she should have worn as bridesmaid; whilst Edith, whose name had been associated with Jasper's for so many years, proclaimed with his in open banns, stood behind, the very hue of the plain cambric muslin she wore, and to all seeming passive and emotionless as a statue! Had she been less rigid, less statuesque, she must have broken down, for her heart was bursting. She made her last sacrifice when she consented to stand there

—as she inwardly felt—a mark for all the scorn and shame that rejection could bring upon her.

The Rev. Rowland Ingram had been apprised of the change by receipt of the marriage licence overnight, but the spectators, who thronged the church, were filled with amazement; and it was buzzed from one to another that the licence was *dated earlier than the last reading of the banns*.

There had been an angry scene at Ivy Fold in the early morning, when Mr. Proctor put in an appearance, as there had been the night before, when Allan and Grace arrived, and first became acquainted with the change; but Edith's apparent sanction and passivity baffled curiosity, and disarmed those who would have done battle in her cause.

"There has been some mistake," she said, quietly, in answer to all inquiries; "the sooner it is rectified the better."

There was a much greater commotion when a post-chaise came rattling down Bell Hill, scattering the crowd of Grammar

School boys, and almost running down Solomon Bracken, on its way to Ivy Fold, where it stopped just as the last of the wedding party had entered the door, and Mrs. Statham alighted, with all the dignity the antiquated dame could assume, in full array—fan, mittens, open gown, mob cap, bag-bonnet, and all.

As she sailed up the flagged path, leaning on Deborah's arm, smiling benignly, Janet caught sight of her from the kitchen window. Up went her hands in dismay. "Whya! if yer's not Deb and t' owd aunt, an' shoo as black as a crow from head to heel! It's like to be a black day's wark, I reckon!"

Janet was not far out. The old lady entered with overflowing condescension; curtseyed with formal grace to the assembled guests, spoke a word of congratulation to Mr. Thorpe and to Jasper, who had latterly, thanks to Dora, crept a little into her good graces, and then asking for "the bride," been ushered upstairs, where the ladies were doffing bonnets and shawls.

At the top of the staircase she met Edith, who was trying vainly to hide her wound with a smile.

"My dear," said she, with a kind salute, "I am afraid I have been a silly old woman; but let bygones be bygones; we must all forget and forgive. And, to show that your old aunt is not so hard as you may have thought, I have brought you a nice little wedding present."

Edith recoiled, as the old lady, who had been fumbling in one of her capacious pockets, would have put into her hand a roll of notes, saying, "There are a thousand pounds, my dear, to repay you for your loving care of my little namesake."

"They are not for me, dear aunt," she faltered, in a faint attempt to seem cheerful. "I am not the bride; it is Dora!"

"*Dora!*" shrieked Mrs. Statham. "*Dora!*" and the shrill tones rang through the house, setting everyone in commotion. "What juggling is this? What deception has been practised here?"

Straight into Edith's room marched she,

irate and stern, to demand an explanation ; on which, brokenly as it was given, she put her own construction.

Dora came, clung to her knees and implored forgiveness on account of her great love for Jasper ; saying it would have killed her to give him up.

Edith simply repeated her former words that "Jasper had discovered his mistaken affection in time to prevent a greater mistake."

"And you?" questioned Aunt Statham, fixing her gaze on Edith's dark-rimmed eyes.

"I could not blight two dear lives. My wound will heal in time."

"My dear, such wounds *never* heal, I *know* it. Ladies," (she turned to the friends who had crowded round), "be pleased to leave me with my grandnieces." She parted the roll of notes. "Dora, there are five hundred pounds, take them to your husband and say I send them to *buy kindness for his baby-wife.*"

"*Buy* kindness? Oh, aunt, Jasper is sure

to be kind to me. He loves me so much, so *very* much," cried Dora, enthusiastically.

"Eugh! Silly baby, loves money so much, you should say," muttered the old lady, as with a ready payment of kisses versatile Dora ran off with the wedding gift to Jasper.

The wrinkled face changed suddenly. "And now, Edith," she said, "that we are alone, and fellow-sufferers, sit down, whilst I uncover a wound that has bled since I was as young as you. It is the lot of some women to suffer and endure. It is your lot now, my poor child, it has been mine. You have seen how I was moved by the mere singing of a song, and no doubt thought your old aunt crazy and capricious. My dear, I am an aged woman now, but all the sad history and memories of my young heart centre in that song. It is a terror to me now. I sang it when I was a girl like you, without shrinking. I had no presentiments. Youth is fearless. I had a lover once. I was then beautiful. We had loved each other from childhood. To separate us

his parents sent him to sea, but William came back voyage after voyage, and never forgot to bring me some memorial of his love. If I pet Poll and Fido over-much, it is because they were his gifts. He had risen, was the captain of a merchantman, and we were old enough to marry without consulting others. He had given up his ship for me. Our wedding day was fixed. We were walking together by the shore at Whitby, where I lived, when suddenly, from amongst the rocks, a press-gang started upon us, he was torn from me, and I never saw my beloved one more—*in life.*"

The wrinkled face twitched and quivered. Edith, in alarm, offered a glass of water, and soon the poor old lady resumed her story, which seemed to carry Edith away from her own sorrow in a tide of sympathetic emotion.

"It was during the French Revolution, my dear. England and France were at war. And he was sent on board a man-o'-war, as much distressed as poor me. One night—shall I ever forget it?—I was sing-

ing sadly to myself his favourite song, 'Mary's Dream,' when, oh! my child, it was awful, I saw my own dear love before me, pale as a sheet, and dripping wet. I shrieked and had some sort of fit. It seems, as a messmate sent me word, he had tried to swim ashore to me, under cover of the night, and his drowned body was seen floating on the waves when daylight came."

"Oh! aunt, how terrible!"

"Ah! Edith, it was terrible, the shock almost killed me, for I was young then. I put on mourning for my lost love, and I wear it still, for I mourn him in my heart. And at times he comes back to me in the still hours of night, wet and white, as a token and a warning—my dear drowned love, young as he was, whilst I am grey and wrinkled, old—all but my heart, and there the pain seems ever fresh. He came to me last night, and I knew there was trouble at hand. Poor Edith! I fancied Dora would need comfort, not you!"

At last Edith's tears were falling, and the aged aunt was weeping too, the aunt who in

all her long narrative had never jerked out one impatient "Eugh!" though they plentifully besprinkled her free comments when she found her way to the company downstairs, and watched Jasper with her keen eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

REACTION.

JASPER felt himself in favour. The five hundred pounds in hand were five hundred assurances that he had done wisely; that his diplomacy had been successful; and he began to feel as if Mrs. Statham's thirty thousand pounds were almost in his grasp. Yet the pale face of Edith seemed pictured on the notes, came like a spectre between him and the blushful face of his young bride, and, could Dora have divined his thoughts, she would have been less rapturously happy, nay, might have envied her sad sister so shamelessly deserted at the twelfth hour. And neither would have been especially elated, could the hearts of visitors assembled

to partake of the wedding-feast have been bared before them.

Lawyer Hartley, pushing his spectacles upon his forehead, had made open protest.

"What!" he exclaimed, "sit down to a wedding-feast, prepared in honour of my ward, and laid out to be eaten in honour of her sister? Not whilst I have a crust of my own! Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Ellis. Come along, Doctor, I think we are both of one mind. No offence to you, friend Thorpe, it's none of your doing."

And, as Dr. Burrow took his friend's arm, and retired along with him, it may be presumed they were both of one mind.

Honeymoon trips had not become common. Had they been, Jasper would most likely have preferred to save his time and money. As it was, the newly-married pair went direct to their own home in a hired conveyance, and Mr. Proctor with them, in a state of bewilderment not to be described or comprehended, so many feelings were at work within him. As he afterwards told Jasper, "this wayward wax doll was not the

new inmate for whom he had so freely provided and prepared, as the future mistress and ruler of his household." Then Mrs. Statham's manner was not to be fathomed, and, notwithstanding the five hundred pounds, he had misgivings that the old lady was as adverse to the whole proceeding as he himself.

Adverse, indeed! When the post-chaise carried Deb and Mrs. Statham away from Giggleswick, leaving poor Edith consoled with full assurance of her grand-aunt's approbation and affection, it stopped short of Settle at Lawyer Hartley's door, and before it wheeled away there was another "last will and testament" added to the many Theodora Statham, spinster, had duly signed and sealed.

Her aunt fairly gone, Edith would fain have sought the solitude of her own room to still her throbbing pulses. But there was no respite for her. Grace Earnshaw left her no leisure for her own thoughts. She had a hundred questions to ask, a long string of complaints and domestic trials to

pour into her ear. All little Basil's ailments to recount; all Allan's absorption by Buttermere, who, she averred, made a tool of her husband, and had only urged the partnership to get hold of his money, which she feared was fast coming to an end, so little could she get for her own use. She could scarcely tell why or wherefore she distrusted them, but she wished he was well rid both of Buttermere and his clerk Ellison. She poured all into Edith's ear, utterly oblivious of the effort required to keep agony down and attention fixed. Yet Edith roused at the mention of Buttermere, and was not too self-absorbed to feel for poor Grace in her lamentations that little Basil had never seen either his grandfather or grandmother Metcalfe, and that, though they had no other child to love or to endow with their wealth, neither father nor mother would look at her if she passed them in the street. The riches and magnificence of the Metcalfes made no impression on Edith, but the loss of parental care and love she had herself felt and could under-

stand, and in comforting Grace there was healing balm for herself.

Edith undertook to put Allan on his guard against his partner. She might as well have spoken to the winds. "Basil was a good fellow," he said, "and Grace did not understand business. They were promoting a railway company, and that absorbed their capital."

They, too, disappeared with the next day's coach, and Edith was at last *alone*. Mr. Thorpe was away at daybreak, at Langcliffe, hard at work exploring the great cave, named after the newly-crowned Queen, and the house was preternaturally still. Old Tippie mewed and wandered about, looking wistfully for his little mistress; and even Janet went about her work quietly and thoughtfully. Probably she was asking herself if Tim would consent to have *their* wedding indefinitely postponed.

Edith no longer cared to rush to her room to hide her head; the time for that had gone by. She seated herself as of old in the window-seat, and looked out on the

browsing cattle and the falling autumnal leaves, but her hands were idle in her lap, and she felt as if all care or wish for life, all motive for exertion, were over. She kept her eyes turned away from the recess which had been the death-bed of her hopes, but the very effort brought back all she had overheard. And now, for the first time since that bitter hour, she recalled Dora's reference to Martin Pickersgill, and Jasper's jealousy, and, as if conjured up by the mere passing thought of him, Martin's friend, little Miss Vasey, tapped at the door and walked in.

"My dear," said she, "I thought you might be lonely, so, Elizabeth being willing, I have brought my sewing and come to sit with you."

In her then mood Edith would much rather have been alone, but there was no resisting the kind good-will of Miss Vasey, who began to chat in her amiable way, just as a bird might chirrup, but whether by design or accident the sore subject was

touched, Edith's armour was pierced, and she gave way to a flood of tears.

"My dear, my dear, I am so sorry, but it is all for the best; there is nothing like a good fit of crying to relieve an oppressed heart, just as a good shower clears the sky. If I had not been able to cry my troubles away, I might have been a miserable woman now."

"You, Miss Vasey, so bright and cheerful always," said Edith, wearily.

"Yes, my dear, and love troubles, too. I was very young when my mother died, and my father went abroad and placed me with my aunt; and I was not older than Dora when Thomas Clapham wanted to marry me. He was very different then from what he is now, and I was very fond of him, but my aunt would not hear of it. Thomas used to say it was Cousin Elizabeth who was jealous, because I had a sweetheart and she had none, but I fear he was ungenerous. Any way, I was locked up in my bed-room to keep me from him, and

kept there, and I used to cry and beg to be released, and I was told horrid tales about him until I promised I would not listen to him. And then I was let out, but I was still kept close in doors. And then—and then—Thomas in despair went abroad, went to France, and that was the ruin of him."

"Ruin of him, how?"

"Well, Edith, religion and morals were what the Reign of Terror had made them, and he imbibed principles and notions which put him farther away from me than my aunt's locks and bolts. And I shed more bitter tears over him then, when I was old enough to please myself, than ever I did before. And then I had to say 'nay' to him, with love and Christian principle at variance; and it was a trial—but I overcame it in time, as you will your trouble."

Edith shook her head doubtfully.

"It is not so very long since—only when Parson Clapham died—that Thomas climbed the pear-tree, and frightened me just as I was going to bed, putting his head in at the window and wanting to know for the last

time if I meant to marry him; and I told him I could not marry any man who was not a Christian. He swore at me, and went away, and now he has got a housekeeper at Stackhouse, and I shall die an old maid, but not an unhappy one, I hope. And, if I am not rich, I am at least pretty much my own mistress, and my love-dream is only a memory. You, Edith, have a stronger mind than I, and may recover sooner."

A thought struck Edith.

"Miss Vasey, did you hear that some one mounted the iron window-guard, and frightened Dora and me one night?"

Ann nodded.

"Do you think that was Mr. Clapham?"

"I *don't*. Janet told Tim, and Tim told us that the mud and grass were also on the guard at *this* window, and on the *window-sill* above."

"Why, that was Jasper's room!" and Edith gasped.

"Yes, my dear, but that is not the first time Jasper Ellis has laid his blame on others' shoulders," said Miss Vasey, with

another nod. "Poor Martin Pickersgill could tell you that."

"Martin Pickersgill," murmured Edith, dreamily.

"Yes, Jasper was always playing tricks on him because he would not tell tales. Do you remember the ghost?"

Remember! As if she would ever forget!

"Well, that was Jasper's doing. He stole away Martin's lantern, and he and the bigger boys crept through Martin's bed-room, and took away the very sheet from over him and John Danson, and went off down the pear-tree to the churchyard."

"Are you quite sure?" questioned Edith, with white lips.

"Quite. John Danson told me, under promise of secrecy, and John said it was Jasper who moved Martin's guitar where he would fall over it. He somehow seemed to have a spite against Martin."

The room appeared to spin round with Edith. Was everything coming to crush her at once? She questioned and cross-

questioned, and every answer brought her nearer the truth; and with the truth came the painful conviction that *she* had dealt Martin the hardest blow of all, and that Jasper, whom she so trusted, had directed her hand.

She rose, she paced the room. Her face flushed, contending emotions at work within her breast, indignation and remorse rising uppermost.

She had but to learn that Dora had gone so readily on errands to John Tatham's because the post-office was in the way, and there was a secret correspondence with Jasper, whose letters waited "to be called for," and that the marriage licence, for which he had pretended to ride post-haste to Ripon, had been pre-dated more than a week, to fill her cup to the brim.

It was a bitter potion, and she drank it to the dregs, but it killed whatever was left in her heart of love for Jasper. He had been a deceiver from first to last; had wooed her in very wantonness only to keep her from another, and to scorn her in the

end. And if in thinking thus she was wide of the mark, it was not more stinging than the truth would have been.

Ann Vasey had certainly roused her from melancholy. There could be no more tears shed for such a man. Perhaps, had her love had deeper root, it might have been otherwise; but when her esteem went her love went with it; yet for all that a gaping wound was left.

It was bitterly humiliating to think she had been so beguiled; but more bitter to feel that she had herself done injustice to Martin's noble nature, an injustice never to be repaired.

And now she began to have fears for Dora:—to question the wisdom of giving the spoiled darling to a man so utterly false. And, though she knew of no base motive for his new choice, she mistrusted him utterly now. Nay, she despised herself for her faith in him, forgetting that she had shared the common belief, and to drive away regret or obtrusive thought she busied herself more than ever with household

duties; plied her needle for the poor, visited the sick and sorrowful, or, to drive out evil and bitter feelings, walked out alone with rapid steps through lanes and by-ways, and there planned and fashioned a work of fiction for her pen to perfect in the solitude of her own room. And so in process of time the wound gradually healed, but what lay under the scars was not for mortal to know.

Of this contest with herself absent-minded Mr. Thorpe suspected nothing. Misled by her calm demeanour, he was only thankful she "suffered so little and got over her disappointment so well."

From Martin Pickersgill he heard very rarely; the wedding was quite an old event before letters passed, and though her step-father mentioned to Edith, with some satisfaction, that "the fine young fellow seemed hard at work as a surveyor for projected railways, and, moreover, with the help of Mr. Armistead, had got Osmanthorpe colliery dry at last," he had so much to say to Martin respecting the new cave they had

together discovered, and the explorations going on there, that the minor matter of his daughter's marriage never found its way into the letter. Glad, indeed, would Edith have been to convey through him an apology to Martin for her harsh judgment, but that would have involved so much—the condemnation of Jasper, a seeming advance on her part—delicacy and modesty forbade both, and she could only sigh over a wrong unrepaired, for she had a tender conscience, and it was easier for Edith to forgive others than to forgive herself.

So time flew on under the shadow of St. Alkald's grey tower, dropping healing balsam from his silent wings, and nothing more startling to the nerves of the assiduous authoress, who found her pen an antidote to grief and gossip, than an unexpected antiquary or geologist to entertain, or an infrequent letter from Dora Ellis, who certainly did not spend too many pennies in the new black portraits of Her Majesty for franking correspondence.

Her news too was of the briefest, had a

certain stiffness as if written under supervision—Mrs. Ripley had resigned. Kitty, the former maid, had returned. Fido had not waked from his winter sleep, and her aunt was not to be comforted. Jasper had been to Leeds and seen Allan. Jasper was going to be a railway director, like Mr. Metcalfe. Mr. Postlethwaite was going to be a lawyer himself and leave them, and Mr. Proctor was in a terrible way about it. Aunt Statham was kind, or cross, as the case might be,—and this, with a spice of loves for half the village, was about the sum total of her correspondence for many months.

Towards the end of a hot July, when Edith was doubly occupied with the crisis of her story, and the coming marriage of faithful Janet and patient Tim, Mr. Thorpe announced, with some ceremony, that a party of scientific friends, mostly members of the Yorkshire Geological and Polytechnic Society, or of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, were coming in a few days to visit the curiosities of the neighbourhood, and to examine the Victoria Cave,

the coins, fibulæ, bones, and other relics found therein; that Mr. Howson, John Tatham, and others, would be sure to join them; and that if she, Miss Cragg, Miss Vasey, or any of her lady friends cared to be of the party, they would have a pleasant day and an intellectual treat. He further intimated that Martin Pickersgill, being a member of the former society, might possibly put in an appearance.

How was it that the bare expectation of Martin's coming made her go hot and cold so strangely? And why did she feel so anxious, yet afraid to meet him? Was she fearful their positions were reversed, or was she simply desirous to be just without violence to womanly delicacy, and saw not how?

The morning came to find Mr. Thorpe with the paper he was to read still incomplete, and his pen hard at work, whilst, one after another, strangers came dropping in, to the astonishment of Edith and Janet, who had been told the explorers were to meet in Settle. As each one came in hands were

shaken, and a fresh order was given for a cup of coffee and a collop for Mr. —— A or Z, as it might be; and down again Mr. Thorpe's head went to his paper, leaving Edith to play hostess as best she might to the learned men, and of the eight or nine who so dropped in only three were known to her—Thomas Lister, John Wilson, and Robert Polloc, with whom came Mrs. Polloc.

Coffee-grinding and collop-frying kept Janet in a fume. It was well her bread-fleak was amply filled, so heavy a raid was made upon it; whilst, between the reception of these people and their successive breakfasts, Edith had scarcely time to put on her bonnet and shawl in readiness.

Miss Cragg had excused herself, but little Ann Vasey came tripping across to join them, as lissom as a young girl, hoping for a pleasant change, without caring a farthing for science.

"I thought Martin was to be here," she whispered, glancing around, but Edith only answered with a "may join us on the way."

Others did join them on Bell Hill, who

had paid their first visit to the Ebb-and-Flow, under the guidance of Dr. Burrow, then ventilating his own particular theory anent the well, which differed somewhat from that laid down in diagrams on view at the Institution; and, whilst these scientific disputants were loud in debate on its mysterious origin and action, their discourse sent Edith's memory back to a memorable hour beside that well. But no Martin was here to-day to share her reminiscences.

The relics, Roman, Samian, Celtic, pottery, coins, bones, pins, beads, brooches, &c., which had been disinterred up to that time, were inspected at the museum, and commented on learnedly; and then, after taking the steep road out of Settle by Malham, they were glad to step from sunshine into the green shade of the wooded dell, where Scalebar Force gave life and beauty to the picture. Here science again grew speculative, now on the denuding power of the water on the limestone.

And then, climbing over high walls, over slippery limestone boulders, where Edith

was glad of Mr. Lister's strong arm, and gallant Mr. Polloc came to the aid of Miss Vasey, turning his wife over to Mr. Thorpe, who was all enthusiasm, they reached and passed Attermire Tarn ; there was a turn to the bare bold front of Langcliffe Scars, and an ascent to the Victoria Cave, where the cliff towered vertically above them two hundred feet. They were then seven hundred feet above the adjacent river Ribble, as John Tatham took occasion to inform them.

Here it was, before the two large chambers of the cave were explored and commented on, that Archibald Thorpe held forth, and told over again the story of the cave's discovery, regretting the absence of the young companion to whose faithful perseverance and unselfishness they were indebted for his presence there to address them ; and, though the entrance to the stalactite chamber had been enlarged, he made the danger they had run sufficiently apparent to make Edith shudder ; and, though her stepfather was the proud hero of the hour, every word he said brought

Martin before her in his manliness and unselfishness; and, if a contrast rose beside the mental picture, who could wonder?

Lister discoursed scientifically and poetically of plants and birds as on they went, exploring the river banks, the rocks and crevices; others were great on gritstone, and shale, and fossils, but through all her mind was occupied with memories of the absent Martin, of whom Thomas Lister had spoken in glowing terms. He told—and she was quite willing to listen—what a transformation Martin Pickersgill had wrought at Osmanthorpe Colliery, in the short time he had been owner, although he only came occasionally and went again. In spite of Squire Thorpe and his brutal son, cock-fighting and dog-fighting had been almost done away with, and the Barnsley poet took some little credit to himself for the effect his own Temperance Rhymes had had upon the colliers and their families.

It was not until they were about to separate near Settle Bridge, at the close of the day, that Edith was recalled to herself by

hearing Mr. Thorpe, without consideration, invite the whole party to tea at Ivy Fold. She stood aghast. What would Janet say to thirty-two hungry men coming to be provided for without preparation? Janet, already too much disconcerted by the succession of impromptu breakfasts or luncheons.

Think of it, ladies! You, I mean, who have not a set of servants at command, and unlimited means, you who send out invitations a week or more in advance, and have to calculate your accommodation, think what this meant in a country village, to a young lady with one domestic!

Edith did not dream of disputing his dictum. Her only thought was how to obey. She set off at a run homewards, leaving the rest to follow, arriving out of breath to put Janet in a flutter, and test the capabilities of cupboards and larder.

There was mounting on chairs to reach down china, a rush to the linen press for napery, and to Betty Dyson's for a supply of bread. A boiling of kettles, frizzling of rashers and collops of hung beef; and little Miss Vasey,

stunned by the Babel of tongues, almost incapable to render assistance, after her first run home for Sally, and tea-spoons, and pikelets, and cream; so much, too, was she overawed by the presence of Mrs. Polloc, who sat rigid, the very impersonation of offended dignity. The latter had looked forward to a quiet chat with Miss Earnshaw over a cosy tea, and a little private gossip relative to Miss Earnshaw's brother and his wife; and this sudden inroad of thirty-two argumentative country naturalists she regarded as a personal injury, seeing that Miss Earnshaw had not leisure to bestow a moment upon her.

Poor Edith! It was no slight part of her afternoon's trial to see the portly matron so frigid and unamiable.

All things come to an end, even a scramble to extemporise a feast in a country place where shops are not; even the long meal itself, with all its hubbub of scientific disputation; and then the guests somehow depart. Even Mrs. Polloc, who declined the offer of a bed, preferring the "Golden Lion" on

this occasion. So at length the young hostess, who had had her previous day's ramble with the rest, was left to sink down utterly exhausted, too faint to eat or drink.

And Mr. Thorpe having gone, all elate with his own hospitality, to escort his guests to their inns or their vehicles, there was a lull; and in the lull Janet remembered a letter which came by the post at noon, a *black-edged letter marked "Immediate!"*

CHAPTER XIV.

BEQUEATHED.

WHO knows not the sinking of heart occasioned by a black-edged missive from the home of distant friends?

Edith was roused from the torpor of exhaustion as she saw the handwriting of Jasper Ellis, and was kept in a state of icy dread until Mr. Thorpe at a late hour came in and broke the sable seal.

Its contents justified her apprehensions. Death and disaster were in every line, mingled with bitter invectives against Simon Postlethwaite as the primary cause of all.

It stated that, simultaneously with the appearance of a brass plate upon a certain

door at the other end of the town to indicate the office of S. Postlethwaite, Solicitor, Mrs. Statham—and not she alone—had with singular abruptness served a formal notice on "Proctor and Ellis" to withdraw all papers, documents, and business whatsoever from their firm. That Mr. Proctor, in great agitation thereat, had gone at once to the old lady to seek an explanation. It was supposed that during the interview Mrs. Statham must have blurted out something or other exceedingly irritating and unpleasant, for his grandfather had once more ruptured a blood-vessel, dropped from his chair at her feet, and was carried from her house a dead man.

The sudden shock had such an effect upon the octogenarian Mrs. Statham herself that she was seized with one of her customary nervous attacks, had been speechless ever since, and was not expected to survive; and lastly that Dora, in consequence of the double fright, was lying in a most perilous condition, and cried for Edith. The writer ended by saying, "Do you think that Edith,

of her great love and tenderness, could generously overlook the past and come to her sister in this terrible hour?"

Edith's answer was her presence by the delirious pillow of Dora before nine o'clock in the morning, white as ashes with contending feelings, but ministering to unconscious needs, and stilling the wailings of her sister's puny babe as if oblivious of the treachery to which the feeble infant owed its existence.

With her still loved Dora's life hanging in the balance, and the solemn mysteries of death and birth so close together under the one roof, what room was there in such a mind as hers for petty thoughts of self? All she could see was Dora in danger, and the commonest appliances of a sick-room wanting. In her own quiet way she induced ungracious Kitty to be helpful, dipped her hand into her own pocket and gave her orders with a prompt decision there was no gainsaying. If she shrank from contact with Jasper himself, it was from knowledge of his duplicity, not from wounded pride or

affection. She had long been too indignant at her own weakness and credulity to envy her sister.

It was with a beating heart and a fleet foot she sped for a brief space to her Aunt Statham's. She was barely in time to catch a word and smile of recognition and blessing before she beheld the withered hands extended upwards; the light of another world irradiated the wrinkled face, as the glad cry "Willie, I am coming," broke from the thin lips, and the aged woman and her sailor lover, separated for more than half a century, were re-united in that world where all is perennial bloom.

Josiah Proctor's funeral was conducted very quietly indeed, even the hospitality common on such occasions was avoided by Jasper on the score of his wife's desperate illness. The plea did not operate in the pleader's favour, especially as it was supposed that Mr. Ellis stepped not only into his partner's old legal practice, but into a snug fortune besides.

In this they were mistaken, as was Jasper

himself. The practice remained, the house and the furniture, but what little there was by way of fortune was charged with a legacy of two thousand pounds to Martin Pickersgill, "as a small atonement for insufficient care of his papers," and with an annuity to Josiah's miserable daughter, the mother of Jasper, to be paid in small and secret instalments as directed, in order to secure her from absolute penury, and the pittance from the clutches of the gambling wretch, Jasper Ellis, the elder; and from him, Jasper the son, was warned to hold aloof, lest he should be dragged down to perdition.

It was not satisfactory to Jasper to find that Martin Pickersgill was to have so large a slice of his grandfather's cake, of which it appeared he had actually robbed himself when he laid his hands on those "accursed papers."

Still less satisfactory was it to find Simon Postlethwaite the acting executor of Mrs. Statham's affairs, in conjunction with Lawyer Hartley, who held a will executed the very

day of his marriage to Dora, revoking all former wills, and bestowing the whole of her property, real and personal, on her dear, unselfish grand-niece, Edith Earnshaw, with the exception of certain legacies—£500 to her faithful friend and attendant, Deborah Gill, to whom also she bequeathed her parrot and household furniture; £500 to Mr. Simon Postlethwaite, as a reward for a discovery made, and a secret confided to her the previous day; and £2,000 to that polite young man, Martin Pickersgill, to help him to recover his own inheritance, and to Jasper—*her wig*—that he might laugh at it and her at his leisure. Moreover, it was laid as a charge upon Edith that not one penny of her bequest should go into the hands of Jasper Ellis, who had married Dora under false pretences, with mercenary motives.

"Not a shilling to Dora! not a shilling to Allan! Edith the heiress after all!" Jasper sat there dumb with disappointment and a stinging sense of defeat. What discovery had Postlethwaite made to be so well re-

warded? Could the clerk have seen him pick up the draught-will the day his office was cleared out? It must be so. How else should his motive for marrying Dora be known? And that Pickersgill! What was he that people should drop their thousands into his lap for nothing?

Others were congratulating Miss Earnshaw. He could not; the words stuck in his throat. To attain the £30,000 or more left to her, he had crushed his own love and tied himself to a waxwork vixen who was next to penniless. He had ceased to remember how many years it had taken to scrape together his first £100, or what a fine nest-egg Mrs. Statham's £500 had been. He had no thanks *now* for the giver, he could only in his heart of hearts "curse the toothless old hag and her capricious wills!"

Imagine his rage when Deborah Gill, more grave and solemn in her sombre garb, with the veriest ghost of a grim smile, handed to him before the assembled funeral guests a blue, oval pasteboard box, containing *his legacy*. White with over-mastering

fury, he rose to his feet, dashed the wig, box and all, across the room, and with a fearful imprecation made his way to the door.

The missile struck the crape-covered cage, where Poll moped and mourned in silence for her mistress, disturbing its equilibrium. In like rage the disturbed parrot screeched out her latest lesson, "The grinning imp! The grinning imp! Not a penny! Not a penny!" and the loud echoes followed him out of the house, and through the open street, until he felt as if the very Furies were pursuing him.

Fortunately, he betook himself to the nearest refuge—turning sharply into the office so recently his good grandfather's, and there, with his fingers in his foxey hair, and his elbows on the desk he had violated, let the whirlwind in his breast whirl itself out. Had he gone to his wife's room in his wrath, the consequences might have been fatal. As it was, Edith's care, not to say Edith's freely spent coin—Jasper never knew the cost of her illness—helped to

restore Dora to her husband and her babe—though shorn of the sunny curls which had been her pride and glory.

Edith had been seven weeks from home, was anxious to return, her presence under that roof was something more than irksome; only imperative affection and duty had called and kept her there. She could not meet Jasper with equanimity; for she had a growing conviction that Dora was more wronged than herself.

Nor was she satisfied to leave her sister to linger through convalescence in a home where her delicacy and fragility were disregarded, and where parsimony took the place of prudence. Dora's helplessness had done much to ensure her forgiveness, if not to obliterate the memory of deceit.

It was a bright Monday morning in late September. Edith was about to propose that the mother and her babe should accompany her back to Ivy Fold, for perfect restoration, when Dora herself by a sudden outburst, bore down the barriers of forbearance.

With Jasper at her heels, endeavouring to check her, she rushed, in her dressing gown, into the room where breakfast was laid, and smarting herself under a taunt of his, commenced an attack on the sister who had so generously surrendered her private feelings to serve her. Remonstrance was useless. She ran on, "I say you alienated Aunt Statham's affection from me with falsehood and deception, you did! And you got her to make a will to rob me, her namesake and her pet, of the fortune she had left to *me*. She had left it to me! I know she had. *Jasper himself had seen the will!*"

"*Had he?*" Edith turned her searching dark eyes full on Jasper, who quailed before their light. There was mingled pity and contempt on her lips. "Then the secret is out! I am sorry for *your wife*, Mr. Ellis!" And, drawing herself up to her full height, she left the room without another word to either, wounded to the core by his baseness and Dora's ingratitude.

In less than an hour she and her few

belongings were waiting for coach-time in the new office of Mr. Postlethwaite, her dead aunt's legal representative, listening with weary ears to details of the property now her own ; to the technicalities of probate and other matters, for which, just then, she had little care. She did rouse to congratulate her grave executor on being told that so soon as Mrs. Statham's furniture could be legally removed Miss Deborah Gill was to become Mrs. Postlethwaite, in accordance with a very old promise, of which Mrs. Statham was cognisant.

Naturally, in discussing the provisions of her aunt's will, Mr. Pickersgill's name came to the front, and Mr. Postlethwaite, in what she thought a somewhat mysterious manner, informed her that the suit of Pickersgill *versus* Thorpe had been placed in his hands, and that he hoped to be the means of defeating that fine young gentleman's enemies. An outbreak of enthusiasm on Simon's part which took her by surprise, not more than the word "enemies" haunted and perplexed her. She had barely

presence of mind to congratulate the new solicitor on his client, and the client on and through his solicitor, and her tongue seemed tied when she would have left a message of goodwill for Martin. Afraid of saying too much she said too little.

Even that little, with well meaning but formal Mr. Postlethwaite as interpreter some twenty minutes later, was misunderstood.

As the coach bowled out of Skipton along the parched highway a horseman, with his head bent to avoid the showers of dust and withered leaves whirling in the wind, passed the vehicle at a gallop. A turn of the head to exchange salutes with the coachman, gave her a glimpse of the well-remembered manly face which Mr. Postlethwaite had conjured up for her, and which even at the moment occupied her mind in connection with the problem who were the "enemies" to whom her executor had referred. Her heart gave a sudden bound, but she sank back drearily, regardless of her fellow-passengers, and went on wondering

whether Mr. Postlethwaite meant Thorpe of Osmanthorpe, or Jasper. Surely he could not mean Jasper! The lawyer could know nothing of old schoolboy enmities! Yet somehow she had an uncomfortable feeling that his word "enemies" included Jasper; and it was satisfactory that Mr. Pickersgill's affairs were in other hands than those of Mr. Ellis.

At Ivy Fold another disappointment greeted her. Mr. Pickersgill had spent the previous night *there*.

"Why, Edith, what brings you back without a line beforehand? Martin will be quite disappointed. I told him you were staying at Skipton!" was Mr. Thorpe's salutation.

"Is it not time I was back? am I not welcome at home?" she asked playfully, desirous to evade direct answer on either point; not caring to awaken her step-father's suspicions respecting his son-in-law, or to blame misguided Dora; and still less caring to discuss the question of Martin's disappointment.

"Whya, yes, Edie, quite time. But I wish Martin and you——"

"As welcome as fleawers i' May!" simultaneously exclaimed Janet, following her young mistress upstairs, whither she had turned abruptly as if to remove her travelling attire.

"Do you know what brought Mr. Pickersgill here?" Being in advance, and the staircase dusky, Edith put the question with more ease than had been possible in the lighted room below.

"He coom for soom old pappers, ah reckon," quoth Janet. "Annyhow, I seed maister tak a bundle o' pappers fro t' secretary an gie um ta him; an I heared him saay as he wur glad to be rid on um, lest they should be lost agaan, theere wur no knowin what moight happen."

Something did happen, but not immediately.

Months passed away, Edith flew back to her pen to ease the ache of her heart, which had awakened to something more than remorse for her conduct to Martin. Her novel

was completed. Through a friend of Miss Cragg it was introduced to a London publisher, stood the reader's ordeal, was accepted, published, and made a stir, for in '43 there was less competition for public favour than in these days.

But what cared Edith then? The last friend to whom she had clung, whose heart would warm to the sound of her fame, was by that time gone—none knew whither.

Archibald Thorpe had disappeared.

Five years had elapsed since Keeper and Keeper's master and Martin discovered the Victoria Cave. With the permission of the landowner he had at his own cost excavated and explored, and, though it was left for geologists and antiquaries nearer our time, with Government aid, to discover the vast proportions of the cavern, chamber beyond chamber, and to lay bare the secrets of prehistoric man, buried layer below layer under their feet, he found sufficient to give a fresh drift to his scientific mind. He wrote, he talked, he lectured about his discovery, and, fired with enthusiasm by his correspond-

ents, dreamed of hidden caves amongst the mountain limestone only waiting the sharp eye of the explorer. A very mania for cave-hunting seemed to possess him. He and Keeper would set out at dawn to return at nightfall weary and be-mired, most likely soaked to the skin. Sometimes he would be away for days together.

On such an expedition he set forth late in the autumn of '43, but days lengthened into weeks, and the anxious weeks crept into months, yet nothing was heard or seen of either him or Keeper.

Silence and shadow seemed to have fallen upon Ivy Lodge. Edith waiting, still waiting, had lost all motive to ply her pen. She was rich; there was no need to write for gain. She was alone, forgotten by those of her own blood; despised and shunned by the noble soul she had wounded in her blind prejudice. What cared she to write for fame!

Janet was wearying of her bonds. Tim was urgent; and then, not caring to be left with only a stranger on the hearth, Edith

proposed that the pair should marry, and Tim take up his abode there; from which neither Miss Cragg nor Janet dissented.

Once more there was danger of Edith drifting into melancholy. A certain volume of Moore's melodies found its way to the piano; there were tender and pathetic lyrics, notably one, which had a strange fascination for her, and she would sit and sing sad songs in the twilight with never a soul to listen. A sharp remedy was needed, and in the inscrutable decrees of Providence it was at hand.

It was midwinter. The rain had been falling all the day in a direct, steady downpour from a grey sky without a break. To say that night set in early would be an error; there had scarcely been any daylight. Candles had been burned from three in the afternoon. Solomon Bracken was slowly dying, and Edith had just come back from his bedside, whither she had gone with nourishment for the failing body, and balm for the passing soul.

Bonnet and cloak were hung up; her tea

untasted lay on the little round table before her; the rain, falling down the wide chimney, sputtered in the fire, and kept the blaze subdued, and on the hearth old Tip lay wheezing almost at *his* last gasp. The old clock burred hoarsely, then beat out *five* with sharp metallic ring, reminding Edith that she was an hour late. One, two, three, four, five, boomed from St. Alkald's tower, and whether it was her visit to old Solomon, or the rain, and the firelight, or the striking clocks, or all together, her thoughts flew back to that night nearly fourteen years before, when she had sat looking in the fire upstairs, after her sister had been committed to her care by her dying mother, and Solomon Bracken's shriek had—— Her reverie was broken in upon by the sound of heavy wheels in the lane, and a loud "Whoa!" as a horse and vehicle were brought to a stand at the gate, and there was a clatter of hob-nailed boots upon the flagged path.

Edith, her heart beating with a strange foreboding, was at the door as soon as Janet.

By the lantern swung on the shaft of the cart they saw it was the Skipton carrier.

"Ah've brout yo' summut to tak' care on," he said, pointedly.

He had indeed. Crouched and huddled amongst hampers and boxes, so arranged as to afford the best shelter, with only sacks and straw to soften asperities, and keep the tiny feet from freezing, was a white, thin, wistful creature, who answered to the cry of "Dora!" with a low piteous sob, which went to her sister's heart. And on her lap was a big bundle that woke with a cry to tell that it was human.

"Shoo's bin badly used, shoo hez," said the friendly carrier, as he lifted, first the boy, and then the fragile mother, out of the cart.

Badly used! It needed no prophet to proclaim that. And it needed no more than the sight of the emaciated forms before her to call up all Edith's sisterly feeling, and turn the waters of Lethe back upon memories of wrong and estrangement.

It was Dora, the Dora she was sworn to cherish.

The carrier had a guerdon for his compassion that was likely to keep charity alive. And Janet, taking Mrs. Ellis in her arms as if she were a child, laid her on the big sofa, whilst Edith did her best to restore warmth to the child's blue limbs. Wraps to remove were next to none.

Warm tea, hot toast, were almost clutched at, swallowed ravenously, and in the excitement no one observed that Tip had crawled beneath the sofa, to die.

What had brought wife and child of a thriving solicitor to such a pass?

CHAPTER XV.

A GREEN BAY TREE.

ALL they could learn at first was that she had "escaped," and was in terror lest she should be traced and forced back; terror which alternated with sobbing prayers for Edith's forgiveness, and fears for her child, on whose feeble frame cold and exposure had done their work.

When not even Janet's warm bath could invigorate the boy, Tim was despatched in speed and secrecy for Dr. Burrow.

As if by accident, he dropped in upon them, professed surprise, asked how their visit came about, took the little fellow on his knee, made his observations, went into the kitchen for a few minutes with the lan-

guid child in his arms, and when he came back a restorative, brought on speculation, had been administered.

Then the shrewd doctor, interested in Dora's broken narrative, remained to watch the effects of the potion, the very necessity for which was unknown to the unskilled mother.

It appeared—making due allowance for Dora's habitual exaggeration—that no sooner had insulted Edith quitted their house in disgust so long ago, than Jasper threw off the mask and almost broke her (Dora's) heart by a declaration that he would not have married such a tigress, for all her wax-work beauty, if he had not counted on £30,000 to pay him for the sacrifice; that even at the time he married her he was half inclined to forego his prospect of Mrs. Statham's money and keep his promise to her better sister, whom he still loved and worshipped with all his heart and soul; that, stung to the core, she had retaliated sharply, and was straightway addressed as "*Felina*," and told that he meant to

tame her before he had done with her.

In her weak state the excitement brought on hysterics. A bowl of cold water was thrown over her, and she was left to recover as best she might.

Her boy had been christened Archibald. That was partly in deference to Edith's wish, as Edith might remember, partly in hopes to extract money from her father, which she believed her husband did under pretext of losses, and his disappointed expectations. Indeed, she thought Jasper would sell his soul for money.

He never let *her* have any money. Once or twice her father had put a £5 note into her hand, or she would have been penniless, for Kitty made all purchases, the excuse being that Mrs. Ellis was too childish and extravagant to be trusted. And even Kitty was brought sharply to account, Jasper grumbling over the cost of the commonest necessaries.

It was not until her father's visits ceased so strangely that she was treated with absolute cruelty. He had long taunted her

with the loss of her beautiful hair, with her readiness to drop into his arms like an over-ripe plum; but now she was half starved, and was never called anything but "Felina." At first she had retorted with "Foxey," but she soon lost heart for that, for her boy, the only comfort she had, was taken from her. And, lest she should complain out of doors, the baize-covered door in the hall, which had stood open in Mr. Proctor's time, was locked.

She fancied Kitty was tired of watching her, or wanted the house to herself, or she could never have made her escape when she did. She had neither money nor food, and, if the good carrier had not taken compassion on their helplessness, she thought they must have died on the road, for she had no strength to carry Archie, and he was soon too tired and cold to walk; they were both wet through, and she was in dread lest Edith should refuse to take her in, burdened as she was with Jasper's child.

"Refuse! Oh, Dora!"

Dora flung herself in contrition at her sister's feet, and their tears mingled.

That Dora's was a one-sided narrative no one there doubted; her own wilful temper might account for much; but Edith had seen the niggardliness of Kitty's housekeeping, before the mask was withdrawn, and the tale of semi-starvation was writ on the emaciated forms before them. Whether in the first instance the result of Dora's daintiness, or of intentional deprivation, it was hard to say. Archie, at least, could not have had a pampered appetite.

He never rallied. Skill and care were powerless. That one day's exposure to wet, cold, hunger, and fatigue had taken all the vitality out of the little frame.

In less than a week a small coffin stood upon a tressel in the recess, and Dora's boy lay dead where she in her babyhood had played with Tippie and her doll, and where, in dawning womanhood, she and the child's father had played with her sister's heart, that large heart so often wounded by

treachery and ingratitude, but which still beat so warmly and kindly.

There was no comforting Dora. She surrendered herself to passionate grief; accused herself of murdering her darling; was not to be deterred from following it to the grave; was carried thence in hysterics, and from that day Edith had a foreshadowing that the hand of death was laid on Dora too.

Little need was there of apprehension that the husband would claim his runaway wife. By Dr. Burrow he was apprised of his boy's decease. No notice was taken of the communication. Jasper *hated* the mother; he did not love her child. They were gone; there were two less to keep. If he answered he might have to pay for the funeral. They who gave the order might pay for it. Dora had cost him too much already. He could not afford to take other people's burdens on his shoulders.

Could not afford! Was he a poor man, arguing thus? No, he was only a man so

eager to grow rich, to accumulate wealth *for its own sake*, that his fingers stuck to coin and soiled it in the contact. More saving, more scraping than in his boyhood, he could not bear a penny-piece to pass out of his reach unless as an item in a sum to return with heavy interest. The lines in his face were deepening and sharpening, as was his long nose; his very frame was attenuating with constant calculation and meagre fare.

His disappointments had made him keen. He had lost some of his grandfather's best clients, but his cunning and sharp practice had brought him others. If he had lost the thousands for which he had bartered his affections, the five hundred pounds given "*to buy kindness for his baby wife*," whom he had made the second sacrifice to his greed, had been put into a multiplying machine that was rapidly turning the brain of sober England. His hundreds had become thousands. Nay, he had begun to count his thousands by tens; was looking forward to come little short of Mr. Metcalfe, or even

George Hudson, the Railway King, in the long run. For the traffic in railway scrip and shares originally confined to legitimate purchasers and holders, had passed into the realms of speculation, and the railway mania bade fair to rival the great canal mania of George the Third's reign, or the still more notorious South Sea Bubble. So, too, the plans and schemes for railway lines and extensions, originally for the benefit of the public, were now, in many cases, mere schemes on paper, backed by pretentious names, to catch the unwary, and fill the pockets of the promoters, who scarcely hoped to pass their hypothetical "Bills" through Parliament.

In all that concerned this traffic, "Buttermere and Earnshaw" kept Jasper posted up, his name flourished as a Director on the prospectus of a pretentious railway company which had its fountain-head in their office; he introduced business to their firm, pushed off their scrip, and they—or Buttermere—made it worth his while. Little scraps of information (obtained no one knew how)

reached him before *Herapath's Railway Journal* had the slightest scintillation, he made his markets accordingly, and so he was flourishing like a green bay-tree.

He was only poor in heart, not in pocket, but that "only" was a large one; it left him too poor to pay for the burial of his child; it left him equally poor when, after a lingering illness, over which Edith watched as a ministering angel, that blighted blossom, poor spoiled, winsome, wilful little Dora, was laid to rest with her boy and her own mother in that grave by Giggleswick churchyard wall, and neither husband nor brother stood there to shed a pitying tear. Only strangers supported the broken-hearted mourner, who went back to her lonely hearth asking herself if she had done for the sleeping Dora all their mother could have required.

Miss Vasey, and Miss Cragg, and Mrs. Hartley all reminded her for consolation, ere they left her, that she had given to Dora the best years of her life, had surrendered her womanly hopes, forgiven wrong and

insult, bound up the bleeding wounds of her sister with ligatures torn from her own, had smoothed the sick pillow, and at the very portals of death opened the gates of life to the dying; but this scarcely satisfied the conscience of weeping Edith that she had fulfilled her trust. In that hour of mourning over two wasted lives, the sorrow that had bowed the younger head even to the grave pressed heavily on the woman who, in her thirtieth year, looking forward only to a spinster's solitary life, sat as of old in the window seat, her white face and folded hands showing whiter against her sable robe; whilst, mingled with her self-reproaches of a trust imperfectly fulfilled, came misgivings that she and Dora's father had mistaken their duty to the child; and she sighed as the conviction grew that more firmness and less indulgence in the early years might have brought forth a better harvest in the riper ones.

She had another trouble on her mind that would not leave her long to brood.

Some time previously, in the early spring,

when first their hopes of Dora began to fade, Lawyer Hartley had come to Edith one afternoon in a hurry, with the startling information that Ivy Fold, the last of Allan's possessions, was in the market, to be sold peremptorily to the highest bidder.

"What, sell the house of his ancestors?" she had cried. "Then Allan must be wanting money."

"So I should think," said the lawyer, drily, "or he would never sell the house over his sister's head without warning."

In much natural agitation she had straightway authorized the purchase of the freehold, cost what it would. It must not pass to strangers, she said. Dora must not be disturbed, she must keep a home there for her missing stepfather, should he ever return. His books, his papers, his specimens were just as he had left them, and so they must remain, at least until they had proof positive that he was no more.

"Then I'm afraid they may be kept till doomsday, my lass!" said the old gentleman,

pocketing his spectacles as he left the premises.

And so it had come about that the house consecrated by so many memories had passed by purchase from the brother to the sister, who had likewise made a bid for the antiquated furniture, double its value. And, fearing lest Allan should be in difficulties, she had voluntarily placed an additional five hundred pounds at his disposal.

He was profuse in thanks at the time, yet now Dora had been allowed to die and be buried, and he could not find leisure to leave his pressing business, even for a day, to be with her in her distress, and Edith sitting there alone felt it keenly.

Stay—she might wrong him—she had read his letter hastily. What was it? "Would be with you—cannot—involved in complications with my partner—wish I was clear of him—fear he is not what I thought him." It was an overleaf postscript, not read before. To what could it refer? Was the trouble at hand which John Wilson had so long foreboded?

She would start for Leeds in the morning. She must be up and doing if aught was threatening Allan. And then thought wandered in the gathering twilight from Allan to Grace, and from Grace to Dora, and from Dora to Dora's father, with a speculative dreaminess of the possibilities of his return to find his little darling lying in that grave where—her thought flew off at a tangent to Martin as she had seen him when that grave was opened first—and then——

The little gate clicked—her reverie was over—on the pavement there was a man's foot which had surely a familar tread. The great round knocker sent its reverberations through the silent rooms. Janet opened the outer door. There was an exclamation, "Whya! suer*ly*!" and in another instant Martin Pickersgill himself, in a rough sort of travelling suit, stood before Edith in the semi-gloom.

Had she conjured up a ghost she could not have been more startled or more agitated. It was well that piano and sofa-back were in the way to steady herself by

as she advanced. It was well that he only saluted her with a formal bow; had he proffered his hand he must have felt hers tremble.

By the time officious Janet brought in candles she had recovered her composure, and invited him to be seated.

Strangely enough, he appeared more agitated than herself—he seemed to struggle for words to explain his errand. Her black dress, her tear-stained face, caused him to stumble in apologies for his intrusion at what he feared was an unfitting time—he was afraid that Miss Earnshaw was suffering under some recent affliction, afraid that he was bringing sorrow upon sorrow.

She gasped, "Not Allan! surely no evil has befallen Allan! I could endure anything but that!"

"No, it does not relate to your brother, Miss Earnshaw. I was myself apprehensive from your deep mourning that he——"

"We buried *Dora* to-day, Mr. Pickersgill," —and now tears sprang to her eyes. She hid her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed

as he had never seen her sob since she was a girl, by her mother's open grave.

For the life of him he could not keep his seat—his self-command. Here was the only woman he had ever loved bowed before him in overmastering grief—evidently alone in her deep distress. What was it then to him that she had treated him with contumely years before? She had been practised upon by a rascal for his own base ends, he knew. The past was gone. He saw only her sufferings and her loneliness. He drew near, bent over her, his musical voice quivered with emotion deep as her own, and his tones were low and tender.

"Edith," he said, and the word thrilled through her, "believe me, I did not know of this, or I would have prepared you and myself, for your tears unnerve me. I am the old Martin, Miss Earnshaw, with all the old feelings smouldering in my breast, and every sob of yours shakes me like an earthquake. You seem alone. We were friends once, until that *scoundrel*" (how he emphasised the word) "poisoned truth—" He paused.

"Is your fiat irreversible? Can we not be friends again?" (He had taken the hand that was crushing the crape of her skirt, and that now seemed to wring his own in her agony.) "I, alas! bring a fresh sorrow to you, but it is a mutual sorrow. Will you forbid me to share it with you? Can you not believe in me, Edith? Mr. Thorpe loved and trusted me."

His generous sympathy was worse than reproach. "Oh! Martin!" burst from her at length, in a tone that told so much; but her sobs were stilled and her pulses seemed to stop, as his next words fell on her ear.

"It is of *him* I came to speak!"

The composure of dread and expectation had fallen on her.

And now, her companion, after raising her hand reverently and compassionately to his lips, drew a chair close beside hers, and —her one hand still in his clasp—told, as cautiously and carefully as possible, how in the midst of his survey for an extension of the North Midland Railway, he and his assistants sighted something which seemed

to be a dog on an elevated ledge of mountain limestone. One of the chain-men flung a stone at the animal but it did not stir. A second was thrown with like result; curiosity then induced a scramble to the spot. It was, or had been, a dog, and it bore a strong likeness to Keeper. (The breathless listener gave a sudden start.)

But—the dog seemed on guard before a crevice or fissure, and into this one of the party crept. His way was blocked by a great stone, and under the stone lay the crushed body of a man. Need he tell her that his friend, his relative, his teacher, lay there, a victim to scientific zeal, or that faithful Keeper had evidently kept watch until he too died? There had already been an inquest at a small country inn, a verdict of "accidental death" returned. They had buried the dog on the spot, but he had brought the venerated remains of Archibald Thorpe to Giggleswick for interment, little dreaming that Mrs. Thorpe's grave had been opened for their only child that very day.

Again did Edith's tears fall fast, and her

whole frame shake with stifled sobs, but now her drooping form had the support of a strong arm, and her sobs were stilled on a warm, loving breast, beating in unison with her own, sorrowing with her sorrow.

There was another funeral in a couple of days, when the churchyard was crowded, for a plain black box, not a coffin, was carried to the grave; but there was now a second mourner. And Edith was not left wholly comfortless when Martin Pickersgill went back to his duties. She had atoned for her early error, and was sure at least of one true, devoted friend for the rest of her life.

By his advice she did not hurry at once to Allan. He said that John Danson, then stationed at Skipton on legal business relative to the new railway line in progress, knew something of Buttermere, from his connection with Manchester, where the sharebroker had many transactions. Martin suggested therefore that, if Allan wanted to get rid of his partner, it would be better that John, a stranger, should negotiate than herself. Buttermere would be sure to take

advantage of her reputed riches and sisterly affection. She need not trouble Honest John, if it could be avoided.

It was a new thing for Edith to depend on others, but a restful feeling came with it, for which she was truly thankful, though her anxieties for her brother were by no means over.

John Danson had found matters in Leeds much worse than had been anticipated. Sickness had lodged in Allan's unhealthy dwelling from the first, had driven Patty away, carried off two baby girls, had fought hard to carry off the boy Basil, had taken the roses out of Grace's cheeks, and much of the grace out of her manner. Still they kept in the house and were unable to quit. As Allan began his married life with a debt of Buttermere's creating, so they had drifted into debt with local tradesmen, which had grown with years and mismanagement. Money was paid on account and no balance struck. Untaught Grace was no economist at home, or Allan abroad, and when John Danson went to Little Woodhouse, he

found creditors in possession of the house, and an auctioneer knocking it down. Grace had been glad in her distress to accept the hospitable shelter of the dingy dwelling she had once despised; and where good old Mr. and Mrs. Sheepshank received the Earnshaws as if they had been unfortunate children of their own.

He found, too, that Allan was bound hand and foot to Basil Buttermere, not merely by a flagitious deed of partnership, but by a debt, with its interest, which had been growing and accumulating for years. Where Basil had got the money to lend was not so apparent; but he had taken care to have notes of hand and I O U's for whatever sums he had advanced; and on one pretext or other to have absorbed the greater portion of Allan's seven thousand pounds.

Some of these notes of hand Allan protested he had not given; but there was Ellison ready to swear to their authenticity, and that of the I O U's which he said represented losses at cards, when Mr. Earn-

shaw might perhaps not have been in a state to remember.

To John Danson, Basil Buttermere was virtuously indignant that his partner should asperse his character and deny his own signature; refusing point-blank to annul the partnership unless all these private liabilities were discharged, and a good round sum paid down in consideration of his silence, to preserve Allan from a criminal prosecution; more than hinting that he had signed Mr. Metcalfe's name instead of his own to an important piece of paper.

Buttermere had a shrewd guess that he was dealing with *Edith* through an agent, and that, freely as she had devoted her life to her brother heretofore, so freely would she open her purse to save him from disgrace now.

He overshot his mark. To his surprise, and that of Ellison, John Wilson, older, greyer than of yore, as shambling in gait, as careless in attire, walked into the office along with dapper John Danson some days later; and, as one conscious of his own

power, insisted on the instant surrender of each and every I O U or note of hand to which Allan's signature had been affixed. And, moreover, he demanded the dissolution of partnership, and the paper said to bear Absalom Metcalfe's name.

For reasons best known to himself, Basil Buttermere thought it best to obey; and, when Honest John left the office with the papers in his possession, he threw back at Buttermere, who stroked his chin viciously, these parting words:

"Now, mind, Basil, if I spare *you*, it is for the sake of my poor godchild, your unfortunate wife; but, if I hear of any more rascality, you had better look out, and your clerk too."

Allan could scarcely wait until they were clear of the office to pour out his thanks, which certainly came from a deep fountain.

The good old man stopped him.

"Do not thank me, Mr. Earnshaw, I have but paid a debt. And I am not sure that as yet I have done the whole of my duty. Thank God rather, whose humble instru-

ment I am, and let your thankfulness be shown in a reversal of all Basil Buttermere may have taught you. Quit Leeds, avoid the men with whom he has brought you in contact, make a companion of your wife, and books your friends; and, if you must have intercourse with others beyond the range of business, seek it in a Mechanics' Institution. You will find neither cards, nor dice, nor drink there. I think you have found whither these were tending. Believe me, you have had as narrow an escape from a pitfall and a prison as I had from the cudgel of your clerk at our first election!"

"What! Ellison? I have always had a glimmering notion I had seen his face somewhere, or knew some one like him! But that man was a dirty, disreputable vagabond!" was Allan's amazed reply.

"Ah, Ellison, or whatever he chooses to call himself! But perhaps you have never seen him after a drinking bout, with his clothes torn, and his hair like elf-locks over a muddy face. It must have cost Basil

some trouble to bring him back to respectability.—And that reminds me you are not safe in Leeds if you possess any secrets of the firm. I daresay your excellent sister will find you the means to make a fair start somewhere else. But mind, it must be a fair start, with less self-confidence, more humble seeking of God's help. And remember, no *good* effort's w*h*olly lost! No *good* effort, mind, nor w*h*olly!"

Before the week was out, Allan's private debts were paid to the last farthing, and he, his wife, and little one safe in the peaceful haven of Ivy Fold, the little one's name, Basil, having been left behind with old associations in Leeds, aud become Theo by general adoption.

Simultaneously with John Danson's departure for Leeds on Allan's behalf, Allan's brother-in-law, Jasper Ellis (who had never a tear to spare for the poor wee wife just laid to rest with her mother and her own boy under the churchyard wall), in reading a country paper at an inn, came across a paragraph headed "Singular Discovery:

The Missing Geologist." As he read, a sinister smile flitted across his face. "Rather damaging that to Pickersgill *versus* Thorpe. A material witness lost to the plaintiff. Neither Mrs. Statham's two thousand pounds nor my soft-pated grandfather's will go far to establish his claim without evidence. I wonder what the plaintiff would give to get at his lost papers *now?*" And that was all the moan he made for Archibald Thorpe.

The Devil's machinery works with cog-wheels, one evil thought succeeds and fits into and introduces another, and yet another, till the whole wicked web is woven, or the machine thrown out of gear. So his satisfaction that Pickersgill—who had clearly robbed him of Mr. Proctor's cash—was likely to be defeated, was followed by his wonder what the papers would be worth to him, and then some little imp suggested, "What would they be worth to the *defendant*, the Robert Thorpe who had been served with a writ of ejectment?"

The suggestion took root in his avaricious and jealous soul. It haunted him. When

he reached home, he raised a plank in his bed-room, screwed firmly down. He peered into the cavity. Yes, the sandal-wood box was there, all dust and cobwebs. He replaced the plank. Unsatisfied, he raised it again, and, to be certain, lifted the lid of the box. Yes, and the papers were there too, and they were worth money. But they were *stolen* papers. How could he best turn them to account?

He pondered and pondered, framed one contrivance after another for secret negotiations with Robert Thorpe, but avarice suggested he should delay until the defendant was hard pressed, and so secure a larger sum.

In the midst of this plotting he was startled by the information that Allan Earnshaw had retired from sharebroking, and that the firm would be found gazetted as "Buttermere and Ellison." He was not satisfied. Allan's frank, upright nature was well known to him, and stood guarantee for the firm. His sudden retirement was perplexing, and *that* Ellison—well, he was

and had always been a mystery to him.

If he had known why or how Allan escaped from the firm he would have been less satisfied. Buttermere, however, had his explanation ready. Earnshaw was unfit for business, had taken to cards, was extravagant, and so was his wife. They had thought best to get rid of him. The company was progressing favourably, and now Earnshaw had gone there were hopes that Mr. Metcalfe would take it up, and in that case failure was impossible. His friend Hudson could get any bill through Parliament. Had he not carried sixteen in one day?

Ay, King Hudson's star was in the ascendant. First crowned in the spirited cartoons of *Punch*, the Railway Monarch wielded a potent and far-reaching sceptre. Far beyond the narrow limits of these islands his sway was felt; his nod could make or unmake men, or capitalists, which was pretty much the same thing. Another Midas, all he touched turned to gold. Another Napoleon, he led his armies from

victory to victory. And Absalom Metcalfe, ever at his right hand, picked up the magic gold as it fell at his feet.

England, Europe, had gone mad at railway speed over railway speculation. Railways were planned to all sorts of possible and impossible places. Business men withdrew their capital from legitimate manufactures and commerce to sink it in mythic "lines," which were to yield fabulous interest. Every investor looked forward to become a millionaire, and the shareholder was a man of importance.

What more likely, now that Buttermere had thrown Allan overboard as the Jonah of the ship, than that Absolom Metcalfe *should* recognise the good deed, and fan their sails with the breath of his favour? His antagonism to his son-in-law was no secret. So Jasper, holding no communication with the relatives of his dead wife, took Buttermere's plausible tale for gospel, and kept in with the "firm."

Meanwhile Jasper's negotiations with Squire Thorpe were protracted. The squire

could not or would not see that the papers referred to could be worth the sum required. He stood out. At the last moment the squire agreed. Money and papers were to be ready at a place appointed. Once more the plank was raised, the box was withdrawn, the contents turned out for examination.

Jasper yelled with baffled rage. The papers were *dummies!*

He saw it all. Postlethwaite had cleared them off when he had so officiously laid down the new carpet for Mrs. Ripley. And he must have had a witness in Deborah Gill. Mrs. Statham must have known it when she made her will. He was cowed. Could do nothing. To proclaim Postlethwaite a thief would be to convict himself.

How he cursed those "infernal papers!" He seemed to date all misfortune and loss to their "accidental abstraction."

But no curses of his could keep Martin out of Osmanthorpe now, and he knew it, although he did not know that the title-deeds had also passed into Pickersgill's

hands from those of Archibald Thorpe, who had discovered them in a drawer where tidy Janet had put them "out o' t' waay," the day she cleared his study.

And when the battle for Martin's possessions was won, Simon Postlethwaite took care to proclaim "victory!" even had not the newspapers held sensation articles on the subject.

Then Jasper could only bite his nails, and count his gains, and plunge into the share market with all the maniacs who were fighting for "scrip," as if every bit of worthless paper so labelled was sterling coin.

The re-action came in 1846–7. The *Times* had a well-considered leader, exposing the hollowness and fallacies of the railway bubble. The great Director, for whom a statue was in contemplation, was brought to bay at an angry meeting in York, where he had been thrice Lord Mayor. He was accused of abusing his great trusts for personal aggrandisement; was unable to confute his accusers. King Hudson was deposed, and with him fell his satellite, Absa-

lom Metcalfe. The panic was universal. Ruin and desolation were the natural result of such a re-action.

When the news reached Skipton, Jasper was like one demented. Only the previous day he had answered a sceptic who maintained that "if one man gained, another lost, that if one man made a stupendous fortune by railway scrip, some one must have lost it," by the blind assertion that it "*was impossible to lose, absolutely impossible to lose.*"

Clients came into his office, townspeople, farmers, and graziers from the country round, the widow who had risked her all, the servant who had invested a life's savings; all were importunate to know if their investments were safe, wanted to exchange scrip of one company for certificated shares of another, or to sell out whilst there was a chance.

He had a plausible tongue, glossed the danger over, said it was a false alarm. The next morning he was found by Kitty with a great gash in his throat, and a blood-

stained newspaper by his side. It contained two announcements close together in parallel columns.

"FORGERY—ABSCONDED.—A reward has been offered for the apprehension of Basil Buttermere and Jasper Ellis, *alias* Ellison, known as Buttermere and Ellison, share-brokers, of Basinghall Street, Leeds, for fraud and forgery in connection with the Z. and Y. Railway Co., of which they were the promoters. The Jasper Ellis whose name figures on the prospectus as a Director, is supposed to be the son of the absconding sharebroker, who, it appears, was formerly a gambler of the lowest type. Both partners are said to have escaped prosecution for forgery many years ago only through the forbearance of the gentleman whose name they made free with; a gentleman well known throughout Yorkshire as Honest John. It is mainly through his interference to extricate the former partner of the firm, whom they had fleeced, from their clutches, that the frauds and forgeries of these swindlers have been discovered. It is

feared they have carried off large sums, for which the Directors of the Company will be liable."

"On Dit:—The new owner of Osmanthorpe, Martin Pickersgill, Esq., is losing no time in repairing the fine old Tudor Mansion, which has suffered so greatly from his predecessor's neglect. Mr. Pickersgill had previously shown his energy and humanity as a colliery proprietor, setting his face against the employment of women and children in his coal-mine before legislation had come to their rescue. Indeed, he was one of the most zealous supporters of the Act of 1842, although not himself in Parliament. He had done what he could to ameliorate the condition of his pitmen by rebuilding their dwellings and introducing sanitary reforms before his claim to the estate had been legally established. Now the busy workmen of Mr. Armistead, the great contractor, literally swarm throughout house and grounds. It is rumoured that Mr. Pickersgill is preparing for the reception of a wealthy bride, Miss Earnshaw, of

Giggleswick, an authoress whose works are not unknown to fame. We have heard that Thomas Lister, our local poet, gave the first fillip to the lady's muse. But we incline to think the rugged mountains around her home would be her Parnassus, the celebrated Ebbing-and-Flowing Well under the scars her Helicon."

Surely here was Nemesis! If the man born on St. Thomas's day was, as the Craven gossips affirmed, bound to cut himself whichsoever way he turned, Jasper must have known as he read that only his own hand had sharpened the double-edged razor.

* * * * * *

Summer sunshine on the earth! Summer sunshine in the heart!

The bells of St. Alkald's ring merrily out over the white silk, the lace and orange-blossoms of a bride, richly dowered with wealth for time and wealth for eternity; over a handsome, black-eyed bridegroom, of noble presence and noble soul, who seems to have nor eyes, nor ears, nor worship save for the one woman who, all her young life,

has been a saint in his enamoured sight; and on this glad day is utterly oblivious that the Saxon martyr-saint is ringing out, from those full-throated bells, a mystic summons for all good angels to draw near and bless the bridal, a potent exorcism to banish evil sprites.

Merrily, merrily ring out the bells, and from rock to rock, from scar to scar, the echoes leap and start, and race away with their tidings over moorland blossoms and tinkling becks. And see, whilst Dr. Burrow, with a smile, gives Edith to Martin, and the Rev. Rowland Ingram gravely pronounces the nuptial benediction, a pure white dove flies in at an open window, circles round and round the crowded church, then hovers and flutters above the kneeling pair, coos softly in response to the Rev. John Howson's last "Amen," then, as they rise, husband and wife, wheels in a smaller circle over their heads, and wings its way like a flash through another window into the clear blue ether.

The hush is broken; there had been a

hush undisturbed by the merrily pealing bells; there is a rustle and a flutter, not of white dove's wings, but of silken skirts and loosened tongues, and the Miss Hartleys, who are bridesmaids, put anxious queries to John Danson and their tall brother William, the two groomsmen, how the mysterious presence of that white dove was to be interpreted, little Ann Vasey chiming in with full assurance of some mystic meaning. Lawyer Hartley, spectacles on brow, suggests that it is a stray from the Bank Well dove-cot, which Miss Cragg, who has a spice of superstition under her learned cap, seconds with a feebler "most likely" than might have been expected, for a whisper, set afloat by Mother Wellington, in whom superstition is rampant, has passed through the crowd from the rear that the dove was the spirit of Edith's mother permitted to bless her devoted daughter before she quitted Ivy Fold for ever.

So whilst the bells ring out their attestation of Edith Earnshaw's last signature in the church register, the question of the

white dove's entity or spirituality is discussed in church and churchyard with opinions diverse as the tongues. But no one dissents from the concurrent assertion of Allan and Grace, that "Edith has been a daughter and a sister in ten thousand, and she deserves all blessings," or from the pleasant chirp of Ann Vasey that, "wheresoever the dove came from, its very coming is auspicious."

There are grand doings also this day at distant Osmanthorpe, where the colliers are regaled, and Mr. Armistead, who has no care to meet Allan, does duty for the owner; and there are grand doings at Cateral Hall, where Janet is in her glory, assisting to prepare the wedding-feast, for which Ivy Fold is far too cramped, even if there was a matron to do the honours.

Scarcely are the bells so jubilant as Janet, for is not her Tim, promoted to be gardener at Osmanthorpe, gone in advance to have the newly-furnished lodge ready for her reception. She is bound to a new home of her own as well as her young

mistress, "an' noan ta quit her service noather."

Others were going to new homes. Allan and Grace Earnshaw, having learned some lessons from experience, and some from Edith's self-ignoring love and life, are about to make a fresh start in busy Bradford. Edith, with Martin's full approval, has turned over to her brother the entire sum she inherited from her father. With this he is to enter into partnership with a well-known wool-merchant, and, if he make good use of his fair start, he is like to come in for a snug hoard when old Mr. and Mrs. Sheepshank have done with it.

There is yet another change. The house at Bank Well is to let. Death has carried Miss Cragg's uncle from Morecambe, and she is again a legatee. She needs neither pupils nor boarders. She and Ann Vasey are the new tenants of Ivy Fold. Ann Vasey, who might be pardoned if a momentary shadow of sadness crossed her that she too was not a legatee, since Thomas Clapham has been gathered to his fathers,

and, eccentric in his will, as in all things else, has left lands and tenements to an utter stranger, of whom he knew only that he was Thomas Clapham. The simple-minded little creature, to whom he had so often offered *all*, was not mentioned. The silence gave her a pang at the time.

But when the bells ring out from St. Alkald's tower, and a travelling-carriage, with Janet in the rumble, rolls away with Martin Pickersgill and Edith, his wife, from Cateral Hall to Osmanthorpe, no one wishes them "God speed!" more heartily than the cheery little old maid, though she does choke down a sob, for no one knows so well the wide difference between "Wooers and Winners."

THE END.

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